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RE-IMAGINING SOUTH AFRICA:

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS, RADICAL CHRISTIANITY AND THE NEW
LEFT, 1967 – 1977

By

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Contemporary History

University of Sussex

March 2011

STATEMENT

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature:.....

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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CHRISTIANITY AND THE NEW LEFT, 1967 – 1977

SUMMARY

This thesis places Black Consciousness in comparative perspective with progressive politics in South Africa in the late 1960s and the 1970s. It argues that the dominant scholarly focus on Black Consciousness, which is passed over as a ‘stage’ in the Black struggle against white supremacy, insufficiently historicises the deeper roots, and the wider resonances and ideological contestations of the Black Consciousness movement. As they refined their political discourse, Black Consciousness activists negotiated their way through the progressive ideologies that flourished as part of the wider political and social ferment of the 1960s. Although Black Consciousness won over an influential minority of radical Christians, a more contested struggle took place with nascent feminism on university campuses and within the Movement; as well as with a New Left-inspired historical and political critique that gained influence among white activists. The thesis draws closer attention to the ways in which Black Consciousness challenged white activists in the late 1960s, who were primarily able, albeit it with pain and difficulty, to sympathetically interpret and finally endorse Black Consciousness. The thesis challenges the idea that Black Consciousness achieved a complete ‘break’ with white liberals, and argues that black and white activists maintained a dialogue after the black students’ breakaway from the National Union of South African Students in 1968. The thesis looks in turn at: the role played by the ecumenical movement in South Africa in the 1960s and 1970s; student and religious radicalism in the 1960s; second wave feminism and its challenge to Black Consciousness; the development of Black Theology, and the relationship between Black Consciousness activists and the ecumenical Christian Institute; it closes with a study of the interplay between intellectuals Steve Biko and Richard Turner in Durban, and the significance of white students’ and Black Consciousness activists’ interaction in that city in the 1970s.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AICA	African Independent Churches Association
ANC	African National Congress
ARM	African Resistance Movement
ASF	Anglican Students' Federation
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BCP	Black Community Programmes
BPC	Black People's Convention
BWF	Black Women's Federation
BWP	Black Workers' Project
CI	Christian Institute
CR	Community of the Resurrection
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
IDAMASA	Inter-Denominational African Ministers Association of South Africa
NCFS	National Catholic Federation of Students
NUSAS	National Union of South African Students
PAC	Pan African Congress
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
SASO	South African Students' Organisation
SCA	Student Christian Association
UCM	University Christian Movement
UCT	University of Cape Town
UND	University of Natal, Durban
WCC	World Council of Churches
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand
WSCF	World's Student Christian Federation
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

I n t r o d u c t i o n

On 24 October 1972 American political scientist, Gail Gerhart, interviewed Stephen Bantu Biko, leader of a new political movement in South Africa, known as the Black Consciousness movement. At the time of the interview, Biko worked for a church-funded and coordinated project of research and community action, the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society, known as ‘Spro-cas’.¹ Black activists had convinced the project’s directors that its community action branch needed to be segregated: the black-run Black Community Programmes (BCP), and a separate White Conscientisation programme. The interview took place at the BCP offices in downtown Durban, at 86 Beatrice Street, a building the BCP shared with the three-year old, black student organisation, the South African Students’ Organisation (SASO), which had broken away from the multiracial National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) in 1968.

Gerhart’s first question to Biko probed the ‘intellectual origins’ of the movement, to gain insight into a new political discourse that was reported in newspapers and hotly debated, also referred to as ‘Black Power’. He replied that Black Consciousness needed to be seen comparatively: ‘We have to see this evolution of black consciousness side by side with other political doctrines in this country, and other movements of resistance,’ he stressed to Gerhart. The apartheid government’s quashing of African political parties in the 1960s had left the stage ‘open to whites of liberal opinion to make representations for blacks, in a way that had not happened in the past, unaccompanied by black opinion’.²

Biko’s broad view of the evolution of Black Consciousness in South Africa has been acknowledged by some scholars, but quickly passed over. Historians have been more interested to question the influence of Black Consciousness on the Soweto Uprising of June 1976, and implicitly, its contribution to the demise of apartheid. This historical focus, which fits neatly into the grand-narrative christened ‘The Road to Democracy in South Africa’,³ has

¹ A. Mngxitama, A. Alexander and N.C. Gibson (eds.), *Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 26.

² G.M. Gerhart, ‘Interview with Steve Biko,’ in Mngxitama et al, *Ibid.*

³ See the new volumes of the South African Democracy Education Trust (ed.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1, 1960 – 1970* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004); *The Road to Democracy in South Africa: Volume 2 (1970-1980)* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2006); *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 3, International Solidarity* (Pretoria: Unisa Press; New York: Tsehai Publishers, 2008); *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 4, 1980–1990* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2010).

limited the ability to see Black Consciousness in the way Biko himself advised Gerhart, *vis-à-vis* ‘other movements of resistance’.

Biko’s comparison was deliberately vague: the sixties had been a decade of resistance to colonialism in Africa and the Far East, youth revolt against capitalism in the West, and Biko’s emphasis on the plural in ‘movements’ and ‘political doctrines’ was exactly right. Arthur Marwick attempts to capture the quintessence of the sixties as the creation of ‘large numbers of new subcultures,’ ‘which then expanded and interacted with each other, thus creating the pullulating flux which characterizes this era’.⁴ South Africa’s sixties were more muted, as the Nationalist Party consolidated its control under ‘high’ apartheid, but the early 1970s was its sixties radical moment, and young black students were the critical part of a drama that began with their walkout from the NUSAS conference in Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape in 1968.

The location of Biko’s interview with Gerhart was also significant. The office in Beatrice Street was an institutional space that exemplified the movement. Although the rhetoric of Black Consciousness powerfully espoused polarisation between white and black,⁵ and launched a powerful critique of white liberalism, activists from different intellectual positions maintained a dialogue in spaces like the Beatrice Street offices. Although the apartheid state made efficient use of space as a dividing factor to create distinct ethnic identities, what Jennifer Robinson calls the ‘power of apartheid,’⁶ alternative cosmopolitan spaces remained, which hearkened back to a more fluid, pre-apartheid South African past, epitomised by District Six, Sophiatown and ‘isolated pockets’⁷ in cities across the country.

As Hilary Sapire and Jo Beall stress, South African cities ‘could also be places of social contact and intimacy across the colour line’⁸ and ‘dynamic sites of innovation, change and reconstruction.’⁹ In spaces such as Beatrice Street distinct trajectories coalesced. At the University of Natal Black section/Medical school in the city of Durban; at the University of the North, Turfloop; in Cape Town at the Abe Bailey Institute and at the Christian Institute’s

⁴ A. Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958-c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵ I use the term “Black” to describe the historically marginalised and oppressed groups in South Africa under segregation and apartheid, namely African, Coloured and Indian and minority groups oppressed on the basis of race or ethnicity.

⁶ Jennifer Robinson, *The Power of Apartheid* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1996).

⁷ H. Sapire and J. Beall, ‘Introduction: Urban Change and Urban Studies in Southern Africa,’ *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21, 1 (1995), 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

ecumenical centre at Mowbray; and in Johannesburg at the Christian Institute headquarters at Diakonia house, trajectories juxtaposed to form an ideological ecumenism that found ways, in practice, to work around more rhetorically extreme standpoints. Here activists crossed ideological boundaries and ensured that debate continued, even where Black Consciousness activists paradoxically asserted the necessity of polarisation. Through their rhetorical challenge, Black Consciousness changed South Africa's intellectual terrain, as they forced white radicals as well to modulate their own positions.

Biko's contention with the interracial meetings organised by liberals, was that they acted as a panacea; the meetings soothed the conscience of the white liberal and encouraged the black person to believe that they were worthwhile and equal, but did not generate any political momentum. But Biko's critique of, and the attack of SASO on, white liberal politics also opened a possibility for the start of real dialogue, provided the white liberal was strong and committed enough to re-evaluate their moral and political standpoint, and the black party was frank and willing to assert his/her point of view. Viewing the 1970s through the lens of the polarised rhetoric of Black Consciousness obscures moments of meaningful interaction and their consequences. The thesis looks to rectify the assumptions of rigid separation (itself a reflection of 'high' apartheid) and to argue that the rhetorical radicalism of Black Consciousness stimulated the search for a new model of political change for South Africa.

The thesis takes the 1960 Cottesloe Consultation as its starting point. The consultation marked an early and important crisis of conscience, after which, a small group of committed individuals worked determinedly for meaningful political change. The Christian Institute's and South African Council of Churches' joint Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (Spro-cas), marked a further significant point in the marshalling and tabling of views. While criticised by SASO for its failure to consult Black opinion, and critically received by more radical academics for its meliorist tone, the Spro-cas commissions functioned as a cross-over point from the white politics of the 1960s to the marked changes of the 1970s and provided a forum where new ideas were explored, the force of which were amplified by the new intellectual and emotional challenge of Black Consciousness.

This thesis foregrounds a collection of collaborative moments in which South Africans were challenged, shaped and moulded. Activists searched for intellectual precedent and were willing to discard fruitless paradigms to accept a radical vision of a future truly democratic South African society. The study therefore explores the 'grounds' as well as the 'bounds' of possibility of Black Consciousness, with a focus on ideas as much as on people

and organisations. It draws on archival research and primary sources from which to draw its conclusions in the light of the existing published and unpublished secondary sources, as indicated in the footnotes and the bibliography. In addition, the thesis makes use of oral interviews. White liberal activists were the focus, to problematise the impact of Black consciousness, and give insight into how they perceived the impact of Black Consciousness, and what they knew of black activists. The interviews are critically situated in the light of the primary and archival research, so as to critically engage with them as complex historical sources.

Origin of the Thesis

An additional goal of this study is to contextualise the lives of two intellectuals, Richard Turner and Steve Biko. Their relationship functions as a motif for the argument. They were the foremost opposition public intellectuals of their generation, prepared to radically rethink the terms of the struggle against apartheid and to re-examine the fundamental premises of social values and human life. Their meeting in the city of Durban in 1970 and their relationship over the following three years brought together intellectual themes of Marxism, existentialism, Africanism and utopian Christian thinking.

The idea for this thesis began in a theory seminar in 2005 in Durban. The subject was Sartre's discussion of the person looking through the keyhole into a room, and the concept of intersubjectivity, which I will define as how meaning is shared and achieved between subjective rational beings. In the analogy, a person gazes surreptitiously through a keyhole, completely absorbed as the voyeur and exists only 'as consciousness of the world'.¹⁰ On hearing a noise, the person becomes conscious and ashamed of themselves; 'the I makes its appearance' as the person becomes conscious of being viewed by 'the Other' – what Sartre calls 'the Look'. The experience of being the subject of the Other's gaze becomes the basis for self-awareness.

Sartre's analogy raises the importance of a critical alterity as the basis for self-reflection, and the relationship between Biko and Turner in Durban during the early 1970s was raised as a fascinating example of a productive intersubjectivity. But how did Biko and Turner communicate? What enabled a white, professionally-trained philosopher to engage

¹⁰ L. Fretz, 'Individuality in Sartre's Philosophy,' in C. Howells (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Sartre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 86.

fruitfully with a brilliant black medical student who was in the process of formulating a philosophy of Black Consciousness, which apparently cast white liberals as the prime enemy? To answer these questions the wider context needs to be understood. Moreover, Biko and Turner's meeting was not unique. While black and white polarisation did occur in the 1970s, for instance with black students pulling out of NUSAS and the Catholic NCFS and threatening to withdraw from the ecumenical UCM, Black Consciousness activists and white liberal-radicals continued to inhabit a shared space and dialogue continued, even where the dominant message was of the need of the Black people to 'go it alone'.

Part of the reason for the legitimisation of Black Consciousness in activist circles, was that Biko was a successful advocate for its profoundly oppositional stance. Among those he directly influenced were NUSAS presidents Neville Curtis and Duncan Innes. Beyers Naudé, the founding and leading member of the ecumenical Christian Institute, was particularly impressed and influenced by Biko. Donald Woods is the most publicised case, who was at the time an influential liberal editor of *The Daily Dispatch* based in Port Elizabeth. Their relationship is poignantly (if misleadingly) portrayed in Richard Attenborough's film *Cry Freedom* (1987). As the final chapter of the thesis explores, Biko's relationship with Turner was more multifaceted. Turner's equally incisive and deeply developed view of South Africa challenged Biko's basic premise that race lay at the basis of oppression and questioned Biko's use, of what Turner argued, were analytically blunt terms, for instance, that of 'white liberal'.¹¹

The hard edge of the ideological attack of Black Consciousness was modulated both by Biko's own pragmatic stance, by SASO members' close links with the ecumenical movement and the parallel development of Black Theology, and by its sympathetic liberal/radical interpreters who benefitted from SASO's own determination to publicise its ideas with a regular newsletter and communiqués. The continued engagement by Black Consciousness activists in public life, the practical expression of Black Consciousness through its community development programmes such as the Zanempilo Health Centre in the Ciskei homeland, and sympathetic allies like Fr. Aelred Stubbs, all contributed to a movement that quickly outgrew its intellectual birthplace in the black universities.

With the murder of Biko in 1977, and the banning of Black Consciousness organisations in the same year, the state crushed the ideological ecumenism that this thesis

¹¹ R. Turner, 'Black Consciousness and White Liberals,' in T.G. Karis and G.M. Gerhart (eds.), *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa 1882-1990. Volume 5 Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 428.

examines. What remained of Black Consciousness lacked the broad-based support it commanded during the 1969 to 1977 period as the social and political context had changed. The rhetorical critique remained, in the form of Biko's incisive political analysis of South Africa, but the discourse sorely lacked the cocoon of progressive political organisations and individuals, as well as the personal contacts within the ecumenical movement and with radical students.

The Awareness of Space

In comment on the dominance of social history in South Africa's historiography, Jennifer Robinson has challenged scholars to be explicit about the 'theoretical implications' of their study, and the need to 'confront' the 'conceptual frameworks' that work 'silently to support apparently factual historical narratives'.¹² Seeking to respond to Robinson's challenge, this thesis incorporates and reflects critically upon 'the spatial imagination' of history, the historical importance of place, trajectories and circuits of ideas and people.¹³ Conceived of in these terms 'place' is a dynamic sum of constitutive individuals and ideas, a conceptualisation that lays more emphasis on historical agency, whilst still recognising the structural relationships that constrain and bring 'place' about.

Recent scholarship has emphasised the way in which time and space should be theorised as intimately entwined. In seeking to correct a tendency to see space as the unchanging conceptual correlative to a dynamic 'time', new scholarship calls for time and space to be 'thought together'. Thus 'it means that the imagination of one will have repercussions... for the imagination of the other and that space and time are implicated in each other'.¹⁴ Doreen Massey argues that space needs to be recognised as 'the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions'. Space is 'the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist', and that space is 'always under construction... It is never finished; never closed'.¹⁵ In this regard, the thesis poses the question of how Black Consciousness constituted and created space in distinct settings within South Africa in the late 1960s and

¹² J. Robinson, '(Dis)locating Historical Narrative: Writing, Space and Gender in South African Social History,' *South African Historical Journal*, 30, 1 (1994), 146.

¹³ A. Lester, 'Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire,' *History Compass*, 4, 1 (2006), 124-141.

¹⁴ D. Massey, *For Space* (London: Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2005), 18.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

1970s. The question can also be fruitfully inverted: to pose the influence of place on the development of Black Consciousness discourse.

The relationship between discourse and the politics of place has stimulated fresh and original research into the history of science. In *Putting Science in its Place: Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* (2003) David Livingstone shows how ‘the’ scientific revolution in Europe, for instance the reception of Copernican theory, was experienced very differently, depending on local or national traditions that governed patronage and filtered what was deemed to be credible as science. Livingstone argues that ‘spaces of discursive exchange’ are ‘not simply about agreement; they define what kinds of disagreements are pertinent and can be expressed.’¹⁶ Rationality is rooted to a context, and conversely context is also a product of shared rationality.

Shared rationality underlay philosophical as well as scientific innovation. Randall Collins has emphasised the importance of sociology in his study of the history of philosophy, emphasising the ‘considerable extent’ to which it can be equated with ‘the history of groups,’ ‘groups of friends, discussion partners, close-knit circles that often have the characteristics of social movements’.¹⁷ Collins provides useful concepts for this study, particularly his emphasis on ‘intergenerational chains’ for intellectual creativity¹⁸ and the pervasiveness of ‘intellectual fields of structural rivalry’. Philosophers, he notes, appear in ‘pairs or trios, rival positions developing contemporaneously with one another’.¹⁹ Whereas it would be naïve to draw too hasty a parallel between this broad historical pattern and the relationship between activists in South Africa, Collins’s study provides a compelling and useful methodology that links sociology to intellectual history.

Black Consciousness in the History of Black Resistance

Although resonant of the earlier Africanism of the Pan African Congress, which prioritised the inalienable and prior claim of Africans to Africa, Black Consciousness was a new discourse that rested on a more sophisticated political analysis of South African society.

¹⁶ D. Livingstone, *Putting Science in its Place: Geographies of Scientific Knowledge* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 7.

¹⁷ R. Collins, *The Sociology of Philosophies: a global theory of intellectual change* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1998), p. 3. My thanks to Richard Pithouse for pointing me to this source.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Black Consciousness sought to challenge both the physical system of white racism and the psychological dimensions of a crippling inferiority complex among Black people as a consequence of that system. In his definition of Black Consciousness, Biko prioritised the importance of a 'mental attitude' and discounted 'pigmentation,' as being constitutive of the desired Black identity.²⁰ Black Consciousness was to be 'an attitude of mind, a way of life',²¹ an assertion of Black dignity and humanity, which demanded active involvement in the struggle for liberation. This was a project whereby those, historically discriminated against on the basis of their skin colour, reclaimed what had been lost in terms of their culture, religion, economics and education. Black Consciousness was, according to Biko, a 'phenomenon' of the 'Third World,' which sought to respond to the brutalising effects of European colonialism.²² It challenged classical theories of exploitation, by showing that colonialism undermined the supposed solidarity of the proletariat. By prioritising the historical experience of discrimination on the basis of race, Black Consciousness extended the definition of 'Black' to South Africa's minority Indian and Coloured population. Put succinctly by the SASO Policy manifesto, the core of Black Consciousness was to reject the value systems that had alienated Black people and affronted their human dignity.²³

Biko's interviewer in 1972, Gail Gerhart, produced the first published account of Black Consciousness in South Africa. Examining African leaders such as Robert Sobukwe, Anton Lembede, Ashby Peter Mda and Steve Biko, Gerhart argued that Black Consciousness belonged to a 'long intellectual tradition in South Africa',²⁴ part of a 'protracted process of tearing loose from liberalism as a world view'.²⁵ Gerhart noted the high sensitivity of black intellectuals in South Africa to the ideas of the 'black world' at the time, and explored the significant influence these ideas had on the ideology of SASO. Gerhart concluded her account with a powerful endorsement of Black Consciousness's revolutionary credentials. Robert Fatton's *Black Consciousness in South Africa: The Dialectics of Ideological Resistance to White Supremacy* (1986) was similarly forthright about the powerful impact of Black Consciousness

²⁰ S. Biko, 'The Definition of Black Consciousness,' in S. Biko, *I Write What I Like* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2004), 52.

²¹ 'SASO Policy Manifesto,' *SASO Newsletter*, 1, 3 (August 1971), 10.

²² Biko, *I Write*, 53. I explore this in more depth in I. Macqueen, 'The Black Consciousness Critique of Europe,' in M.N. Harris, A. Agnarsdóttir and C. Lévai (eds.), *Global Encounters European Identities* (Pisa: Plus-Pisa University Press, 2010), 57-67.

²³ 'SASO Policy Manifesto,' *SASO Newsletter*, 1, 3 (August 1971), 11.

²⁴ G. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Los Angeles: California University Press, 1978), 2.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

on South Africa, as it aimed to create an ‘ethico-political rupture’ in the country.²⁶ Other studies, however, have been more critical.

Trotskyist and exiled academic, Baruch Hirson’s, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash* (1979) was sceptical of the role played by the SASO students. Hirson argued they ‘lagged far behind the workers’ and ‘were curiously insensitive to the broader struggles around them’,²⁷ and doubted the ‘extent to which the ideology spread’.²⁸ Hirson’s study of Black Consciousness was focused primarily on the Soweto Uprising of 1976, and questioned the role played by Black Consciousness. But this implicit teleology overlooked details of the historical context that were significant. David Hirschmann also assessed the significance of Black Consciousness for the 1976 Soweto Uprising. He argued that the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) did not have direct *organisational* influence on the organisations involved in the uprising, most importantly the South African Students’ Movement (SASM). Instead, he described Black Consciousness, paraphrasing Gerhart, as a ‘transitional philosophy, aimed at overcoming the psychological handicaps which [had] crippled African politics for so long’.²⁹ After 1976, Hirschmann contended, the limitations were apparent particularly that Black Consciousness could not provide a comprehensive strategy for liberation. Black Consciousness was thus ‘a victim of its own success’; it successfully radicalised ‘young, mainly educated blacks,’ but as political developments gained pace, its limitations were exposed and its function exhausted.³⁰

Other studies have been more sympathetic, as they approached Black Consciousness with a broader perspective. Sam Nolutshungu’s *Changing South Africa: Political Considerations* (1982), analysed Black Consciousness in relation to the question of ‘the place of politics in the general problem of change’ in South Africa.³¹ His main insight posited that the state ‘conditions the terms of domination and submission’ as well as ‘the political behaviour that challenge and reject it’.³² He viewed SASO primarily as a *movement* rather than as a political organisation, giving the broad appeal of Black Consciousness ideas, and the relative weakness

²⁶ R. Fatton, *Black Consciousness in South Africa: The Dialectics of Ideological Resistance to White Supremacy* (New York: University of New York Press, 1986), 72

²⁷ B. Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution?* (London: Zed Press, 1979), 283

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 288

²⁹ D. Hirschmann, ‘The Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa,’ *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 28, 1 (March 1990), 21.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

³¹ S. Nolutshungu, *Changing South Africa: Political Considerations* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), xi.

³² *Ibid.*, 147.

of SASO organisationally, as the main reasons for this assessment. CRD Halisi's *Black Political Thought in the Making of South African Democracy* (1999) situated Black Consciousness within the context the 'imprint of black racial nationalism on political thought in South Africa'.³³ Halisi identified the nexus of: black South African political thought, African and African-Diaspora theories of anti-colonialism and racial liberation, and New Left student radicalism, as influential factors for Black Consciousness. Drawing on Mannheim's sociology of generational identity, Halisi judged Black Consciousness to be the 'theoretical expression of a younger generation of black South Africans', and the reconstruction of Black Nationalism from 'a different generational and theoretical perspective'.³⁴

Like Gerhart and Fatton, Saleem Badat's study *Black Student Politics, Higher Education and Apartheid* (1999), endorsed the revolutionary nature of Black Consciousness. Badat contended that SASO was a 'revolutionary national student political organisation,' which 'constituted black students as an organised social force within the national liberation movement'. Black Consciousness-aligned organisations, he argued, 'functioned as catalysts of collective action and schools of political formation, and contributed to the erosion of the apartheid social order, as well as to the social transformation of South Africa'.³⁵ Badat also distinguished between a student organisation and a student movement; whereas an 'organisation' is 'a collective of students whose basis of affiliation to the organisation is either political, cultural, religious, academic and/or social,' a 'movement' shifts identification to the 'sum total of action and intentions of students individually, collectively and organisationally that are directed for change in the students' own circumstances and for educational and wider social change'.³⁶

Both Hirschmann's and Hirson's dismissal of Black Consciousness as a 'transitional philosophy,' fails to explain its continuing salience for South Africa, both pre- and post-apartheid. The edited volume by Pityana, Ramphela, Mpumlwana and Wilson, *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (1991) provides support for a more generous assessment of the significance of Black Consciousness. Drawn from a conference

³³ C.R.D. Halisi *Black Political Thought in the Making of South African Democracy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 1.

³⁴ C.R.D. Halisi, 'Biko and Black Consciousness Philosophy: An Interpretation,' in B. Pityana, M. Ramphela, M. Mpumlwana and L. Wilson (eds.), *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1991. London: Zed Books, 1992), 100-1.

³⁵ S. Badat, *Black Student Politics, Higher Education and Apartheid: From SASO to SANSCO, 1968-1990* (Pretoria: HSRC Publishers, 1999), preface.

³⁶ D. Jacks, *Student Politics and Higher Education* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), cited in Badat, *Black Student Politics*, 22.

held in Harare in June 1990, and co-funded by the World Council of Churches' Programme to Combat Racism (PCR), this collection offered a broad and intimate contribution, which explored, in Kogila Moodley's words, 'the continued impact' of Black Consciousness in South Africa. Pityana's essay 'Revolution Within the Law?' is also particularly helpful. Here we have the explanation of the title, as Pityana shows, that Black Consciousness 'believed that radical political activity could still be undertaken within the constraints of the legal and political structures of apartheid' thus 'pushing to the limit the bounds of possibility'.³⁷ Pityana concluded, in retrospect, that this position showed a political naiveté on the part of the Black Consciousness adherents, and that 'no authentic revolutionary struggle' could take place without the risk of breaking the law.³⁸

Anthony Marx's study, *Lessons of Struggle: South African Internal Opposition, 1960 – 1990* (1992), developed the insight that the ideas and strategies of opposition groups in South Africa 'developed with reference to earlier experiences, carrying the lessons of struggle forward over generations'.³⁹ Due to the breadth of his study, covering the period from 1960 to 1990, much of Marx's attention is focused on Soweto and its aftermath. The growth of Black Consciousness is examined from this standpoint, which raises the temptation to see the discourse in a teleological, pre-Soweto sense.

This thesis will argue that Black Consciousness was a peculiarly composite product of its time and place.⁴⁰ Mabel Maimela's doctoral study, 'Black Consciousness and White Liberals in South Africa: Paradoxical Anti-Apartheid Politics,' was an important lead in this direction. In her study Maimela asserts that rhetorical flourishes of the time 'veiled an often complex symbiotic reality' where Black Consciousness 'was frequently dependent on material support from white liberals for the survival of the organisation while the same liberals in turn benefited from associating with a body which had gained the confidence of the black community'.⁴¹ Maimela called this relationship the 'paradoxical' antiapartheid politics of Black Consciousness. While acknowledging the paradoxical nature of the relationship, Maimela's

³⁷ B. Pityana, 'Revolution Within the Law?' in Pityana et al., *Bounds of Possibility*, 202

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 212

³⁹ A. Marx, *Lessons of Struggle: South African Internal Opposition, 1960 – 1990* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 32.

⁴⁰ A comparison may be drawn with the 1920s and early 1930s, where Peter Walshe describes the awakening of 'an eclectic radicalism' among Africans. P. Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: The African National Congress 1912-1952* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1970), 158.

⁴¹ M.R. Maimela, 'Black Consciousness and White Liberals in South Africa: Paradoxical Anti-Apartheid Politics,' (Ph.D. thesis, University of South Africa, 1999), 3-4.

argument can be further developed; whereas Maimela gave a pragmatic reason for the paradox, as mutual financial and ideological support, the thesis asserts a strategic alignment, negotiated and constituted in time-place specific contexts.

A significant new study edited by Andile Mngxitama, Amanda Alexander and Nigel Gibson, has provided a valuable resource for this thesis.⁴² The volume coincided with the thirtieth anniversary of the death of Biko, and explicitly engages with his memory and renewed questions about the contribution of Black Consciousness to the liberation cause. With this volume, Black Consciousness has been brought back into critical focus.

Radical Christianity

The thesis will examine in particular religious thought and Church politics in relation to Black Consciousness, but within a network of other influences that have been neglected. Black Consciousness student leader and now vice chancellor of the University of South Africa, Barney Pityana, chose to foreground the role of religion for Black Consciousness in a speech in 2007 to commemorate the death of Biko. He reminded his audience that Black Consciousness ‘began to be conceived within the womb of the religious societies and organisations; this is a very significant factor that gets lost’.⁴³

The role and presence of Christianity in South Africa is not sufficiently engaged with in the secondary literature on Black Consciousness, and it is taken as incidental that people like Aelred Stubbs, a member of the Anglican Community of the Resurrection (CR), or David Russell, a member of the same order, provided nourishment and assistance to Black Consciousness activists. How it was, further, that an organisation like Naudé’s the Christian Institute took the political initiative for exploring alternatives to apartheid and formed its own study commissions on South Africa, also remains to be properly situated within the history of Christian thought and its interrelationship with South Africa’s ‘political’ history. The omission of religious belief, including millenarian thinking and syncretic belief systems, is a more widely representative weakness in standard accounts of African resistance, as Robert Edgar and Hilary Sapire note. As a result, ‘the wide variety of ideological and cultural strands

⁴² A. Mngxitama, A. Alexander and N.C. Gibson (eds.), *Biko Lives! Contesting the Legacies of Steve Biko* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

⁴³ D. Accone, ‘The legacy of Steve Biko,’ *Mail and Guardian Online*, 06 July 2007. Found at: <http://www.mg.co.za/article/2007-07-06-the-legacy-of-steve-biko> (accessed 30 September 2009).

that have been entwined in the making of modern African identities and politics remains hidden'.⁴⁴

Daniel Magaziner's, *The Law and the Prophets: Black Consciousness in South Africa, 1968 – 1977* (2010), is an important new study that takes the oversight of faith and belief in Black Consciousness activism as its starting point. Magaziner delineates the development of a 'political faith' in which a renewed and revitalized engagement with Christianity, by black and white activists, came to provide the logic and spiritual resources for student activists to renew the struggle against apartheid. As Magaziner shows, it was a 'political faith,' and discursively formulated – written into being, refined through debate, articles and a wide reading from the full *oeuvre* of radical literature of the 1960s: Malcolm X, Frantz Fanon, Jean-Paul Sartre, Léopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, James Cone, Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton. Magaziner skilfully tracks the change from Black Consciousness philosophy to Black Consciousness as a Movement. He draws richly from oral interviews, to give close attention to explain how activists rationalised the personal sacrifice their political involvement demanded. He shows how increasing state repression and widespread deaths, were grounded within a religious meta-narrative that twinned martyrdom with an eschatological hope that promised victory over apartheid, and the reward of a just post-apartheid society.⁴⁵

Magaziner's study invites closer historical attention and theorisation of the institutional context in which activists were situated. Although Magaziner acknowledges the significance of contemporary New Left ideas and the activists' search for 'relevance,' his study does not engage with the relationship between Black Consciousness and South Africa's own New Left. His attention is predominantly focused on the Johannesburg, Rand area, and his study begins with the fall of Sophiatown. He devotes less explicit attention to the importance of the Eastern Cape, the significance of spatiality in Durban where the SASO

⁴⁴ R. Edgar and H. Sapire, *African apocalypse: the story of Nontetha Nkwenkwe, a twentieth-century South African prophet* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press; Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2000), xxii. For outstanding research that makes a similar case for the centrality of Pentecostalism for working-class political protest in the American South, see Jarod Roll's *Spirit of Rebellion: Labor and Religion in the New Cotton South* (Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

⁴⁵ When Steve Biko died in police custody on 12 September 1977, he became the 46th person to die under police interrogation after South Africa's suspension of *habeas corpus* under the Terrorism Act, No. 83, which commenced on 27 June 1962. For more on the death of Biko and the subsequent medical cover-up, see H. Bernstein, *No. 46 – Steve Biko* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund, 1978).

headquarters were based,⁴⁶ and the way local dynamics in the city interacted with SASO activists and vice-versa.

How and why the church came to the position where it sought to accommodate Black Nationalism, New Left socialism and trade union radicalism within its understanding of its earthly mandate and how the results of this strategic alignment played out, also remains to be developed within standard accounts of Black Consciousness.⁴⁷ The relationship between the Christian Institute and the BCM was an important factor, challenging radical Christians to identify with the Black struggle and to understand the qualified role whites could play. Peter Walshe's *Church Versus State in South Africa: The Case of the Christian Institute* (1983) provides the only book-length study of the Christian Institute. Founded in 1963 under the leadership of Beyers Naudé, Walshe argues that the Institute came to represent the 'cutting edge' of radical Christian political thought in South Africa, moving from its early liberal position, to a later radical outlook, formed by its close relationship with Black Consciousness and Black Theology.

A focus on religion is the explicit concern of Charles Villa-Vicencio's *Between Christ and Caesar: Classic and Contemporary Texts on Church and State* (1986). Villa-Vicencio argues of South Africa that 'such is the intensity of church-state relations' that 'the political history of this land cannot be understood without reference to [their] interaction'.⁴⁸ Vicencio uses the Council of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK), assembled in 1915, as a motif for the broader church struggle in South Africa. The NGK Council, he shows, was not prepared to condemn the Afrikaner 1914/1915 rebellion after the Botha government's decision to enter the First World War on the side of Great Britain. He sets their theological reasoning, which held there were instances where 'the legal authority of the state may be disobeyed', against later demands of the apartheid regime, for absolute obedience from the Church. There are historical instances, Vicencio also contends, where the Church has a prophetic duty to disobey the state. The story of the interaction between Black Consciousness and the Church is key to understanding how, by the 1980s churchmen like Allan Boesak and Desmond Tutu, were at the forefront of the antiapartheid struggle.

⁴⁶ Although in his doctoral study, from which the book is drawn, Magaziner recognises that Durban and the Durban Medical School was 'the unquestioned laboratory for Black Consciousness ideas'. D.R. Magaziner, 'From Students to Prophets: Writing a Political Faith in South Africa, 1968 – 1977,' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin, 2007), 33 footnote.

⁴⁷ The broader context and background was the 'church struggle' in South Africa. See J.W. De Gruchy's, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*. Second Edition (London: Collins, 1986).

⁴⁸ C. Villa-Vicencio, *Between Christ and Caesar: Classic and Contemporary Texts on Church and State* (Cape Town: David Philip; Michigan: Eerdmans, 1986), 197.

South Africa's New Left

Halisi observes that South Africa produced an 'indigenous New Left,' and argues 'the leaderships of various South African student groups had connections to, and attitudes reflexive of, the international New Left'.⁴⁹ The relationship of these students to the established nationalist organisations was complicated by their 'generational identity,' revealed in the ideas they held about nationalism, internationalism, race relations and citizenship. Halisi raises two questions that are pertinent to this thesis. First, he questions what the relationship between NUSAS and SASO reveals about 'the evolution of a transracial, generational discourse on South African citizenship'.⁵⁰ Secondly, he questions the extent to which the 'black component of the New Left' offered an innovative perspective on racial segregation.⁵¹

Linked to SASO and the BCM were a small number of radical white students.⁵² Andrew Nash has provided a compelling account of their legacy. He remarks the generation began with 'a few dozen intellectuals and activists in the 1960s,' who 'came to maturity in the late 1970s, and were a powerful presence in South African political and intellectual life throughout the 1980s'.⁵³ Nash cites Karis and Gerhart's documentary history *From Protest to Challenge. Vol. 5: Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-79* (1997), who remark that the government repression of the 1960s could not prevent 'liberal and radical whites from helping to midwife the two most potent organisational innovations among blacks, the black consciousness movement and the independent trade unions'.⁵⁴ The importance of this contention is evidently central to the concern of the thesis. The need for a clear and systematic engagement of their historical relationship to Black Consciousness is further apparent.

Nash also engages with what he calls Turner's 'inspiring, yet strangely ill-defined, legacy'.⁵⁵ Nash sees five premises underlying Turner's radicalism: (1) that politics is intimately

⁴⁹ Halisi, *Black Political Thought*, 9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁵⁴ Karis and Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence*, 85.

⁵⁵ A. Nash, 'The Moment of Western Marxism in South Africa,' *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 29, 1 (1999), 68.

linked with personal identity; (2) that this identity is the product of one's ethical choices; (3) that an individual must constantly choose between capitalism or the 'Christian human model'; (4) organisation plays a role only so far as it is 'a catalyst' for change; (5) analysis is restricted to 'a point of view analysis'. Nash situates Turner's premises in their historical context, where Black Consciousness had pushed liberal whites to the margins of the liberation struggle. The 'moment of Western Marxism in South Africa,' Nash asserts, began with the recognition among radical white students of this fact – 'they were not part of the social force which would bring about revolutionary change'.⁵⁶ The thrust of Nash's ambitious paper moves on to examine the broader lessons that this 'moment of Western Marxism' holds for those trying to rebuild a South African left. This thesis turns critical gaze back to the historical context to interrogate more closely the shift that white radicals made.

Nash cited Thomas Karis's and Gail Gerhart's documentary history of the period 1964 to 1979. Their study was a vital resource for this thesis, and their conclusion ties in well with the argument. As they conclude their overview of the period, '[p]erhaps most important in transforming South Africa in the 1970s,' 'were changes not visible to the eye'. These changes were 'the dramatic shifts in perception that altered the subjective reality of South Africans on both sides of the colour line'.⁵⁷ This thesis engages with these 'dramatic shifts in perception' and examines the contestations, discussions and dominant ideas of the period.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter explores the historical role of the ecumenical movement in South Africa, and notes in particular its commitment to social justice. The chapter explores the quickened pace of decolonisation in Africa, the Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960 and the subsequent Cottesloe Consultation of December 1960. It stresses how Cottesloe set a tone for ecumenical engagement for the decade. The realignment of international Christian thinking provided a reference point for the ecumenism of progressive movements between 1967 and 1977. The discussion covers the neglected role of the Anglican Students' Federation and the National Catholic Federation of Students as alternate sources of politicisation for students in the 1960s. It points to the intimate interrelationship between missionary liberalism and the Eastern Cape, the home of Black Consciousness leaders Steve

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵⁷ Karis and Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence*, 336.

Biko and Barney Pityana. Doreen Massey's concept of 'throwntogetherness' (a term she uses to describe the contingent and complicated intermeshing of people and ideas in a place) is particularly apt considering the close and productive relationships that played out in the Eastern Cape and then spread to Durban, Natal, with the exodus of Biko and Pityana there.

The second chapter shifts the focus to the Western Cape and the relationship between the newly formed SASO and the white liberal dominated-NUSAS. The argument foregrounds the religious and philosophical radicalism centred at Stellenbosch, and explores the role played by the numerically small Catholic Church in the re-emergence of black trade unionism. The chapter examines the broader context of the thesis, specifically Bantu Education and the generational conflict of the 1960s, and the way in which SASO sought to negotiate the tension between rejecting dialogue with white groups, on one hand, but still engaging, on the other. Whereas official policy rejected undue contact with white groups, Biko proved the exception by befriending NUSAS presidents Neville Curtis and Duncan Innes. The chapter examines the radicalisation of NUSAS in 1971, as well as the University Strikes of 1972 and the radicalisation of SASO in response to the quickened pace of banning and repression from the university strikes of 1972.

The third chapter introduces a more critical engagement with Black Consciousness as a discourse and SASO as a student organisation, in its mediation of a form of radical liberalism in feminism. The chapter argues that Black Consciousness was itself a paradoxical discourse, which sought to prescribe a place in the black struggle for women, and was wary of the developing gender critiques and the wider cause of women's liberation. Within the movement, however, female activists were able to appropriate SASO's liberated 'black man' and adopt a similar, tough stance that enabled them to challenge patriarchal practices within the movement. The chapter examines wider representations of Black Consciousness in autobiographical accounts by black women activists, Mamphela Ramphele and Ellen Kuzwayo, and points both to the importance of Black Consciousness for their political identity, and the way in which both women negotiated its more prescriptive claims.

The fourth chapter explores the resonances between the discourse of Black Consciousness and the micro-political struggles of black churchmen within their church hierarchies. The chapter furthers the themes considered in chapter one, which pointed to the historical convergence in aims between the student ecumenical movement and the aspirations of black students in SASO. It looks to problematise simple, one-way, conceptualisations of Black Theology as an outgrowth of Black Consciousness and asserts

the stand-alone importance of Black Theology, as well as the way in which both Black Consciousness and Black Theology were utilised by black church men to challenge the power relationships of their churches. The seminaries are also considered, as vital spaces within which ideas could develop.

The fifth chapter examines the close relationship between Black Consciousness activists and the Christian Institute, with particular focus on the Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (Spro-cas). The chapter will show how the ideological ecumenism that characterised the leadership of Spro-cas under Peter Randall, and the Christian Institute (CI) under Beyers Naudé, allowed for a discussion of political, economic and social alternatives that provided fresh impetus for radical/liberal reassessment in the light of the Black Consciousness challenge. In a broader context, it will argue that apartheid proved to be a unique challenge for the church, to repent and reassert its commitment to a just social order, a 'radical impulse' very much of the 20th century.⁵⁸ As South African liberals sought to regain their confidence after the trauma of the African Resistance Movement (ARM) episode and the disbanding of Paton's Liberal Party in 1968, it was small numbers of Christians in South Africa who took up the political initiative after Cottesloe, to provide the institutional and organisational nexus for oppositional activists. The Church functioned as an institution capable of accommodating a range of ideological partners, on the basis of what the theologian, James Cochrane, describes as 'an ecumenism based on the unity of praxis'.⁵⁹

The sixth chapter situates the period's two key intellectuals, Steve Biko and Rick Turner, in the politics of the 'Durban moment' from 1970 to 1974. It draws attention to the significance of their friendship and its implications for a brief intermeshing of progressive philosophies in Durban, which had resonances in the public sphere of the city and the country. The Durban strikes of 1973, the pro-Frelimo rally in 1974, the subsequent SASO-Nine Trial and the testimony of the banned Rick Turner for the defence are all closely considered. It shows how the particular feature of the 'Durban Moment' was the close proximity of New Left activists and Black Consciousness activists in the city.

The conclusion situates this wider conception of the impact of Black Consciousness in the months after the Soweto Riots of June 1976. It considers the murders of Biko and Turner at the hands of the apartheid state in 1977 and 1978 respectively. The conclusion

⁵⁸ P. Walshe, *Church Versus State in South Africa: The Case of the Christian Institute* (London: C. Hurst and Company, 1983); J. C. Bennet, *The Radical Imperative* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975).

⁵⁹ J. Cochrane, 'Agapé: Theo Kotze and the Cape Office of the Christian Institute,' *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 118 (March 2004), 53-68.

considers the importance of their legacies and the commensurability of their approaches to bring about political change and usher in a new and fairer society.

Students, Apartheid and the Ecumenical Movement in South Africa, 1960 – 1976

...a genuine Christianity is the opposite of a spiritual aroma [religion]; it is an explosive, revolutionary force. It proclaims that a so-called order, in which some have all and more than they need and others live in want, cannot and must not be tolerated because God himself does not tolerate it... We are now in a period in which the Churches and individual Christians will have to choose between the spiritual-aroma religion and the prophetic faith concerned with justice for all men... It seems to me that this is also a great ecumenical task, a task in which all Christians can and must work together.

– Willem Adolph Visser ‘t Hooft, 1967¹

The ‘great ecumenical task’ described by Dutch theologian and General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Willem Visser ‘t Hooft, expressed the logic and challenge of a significant segment of Christian political thinking by the second half of the 1960s. The ecumenical task encompassed *both* a call for church unity and the challenge for social justice. The realignment in the international church and the *aggiornamento* (‘bringing up to date’) of the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council (1962 – 1965) had created a more united Christian stance and laid the basis for mounting a concerted ideological attack against apartheid. The changes in the Christian Church reflected a stirring for change in the ‘Third World’² as well. The acceleration of decolonisation in the wake of the Second World War and the ‘year of independence’ for African countries in 1960 created a mood of nervous expectancy in South Africa.

But Africa’s ‘year of independence’ stood in stark contrast to repression within South Africa. The Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960 sparked international outcry. A march organised by the Pan African Congress (PAC) to protest against the imposition of passes on Africans, converged on the police station at Sharpeville. The crowd of approximately 5000 Africans was fired upon by the police; 69 people died, including women and children, and

¹ W.A. Visser ‘t Hooft, *Christians for the Future* (London: BBC Publications, 1967), 18-9.

² Although the term ‘Third World’ is deeply problematic, rooted in an anachronistic ideological opposition between participatory democracy and state-directed communism, it will be used without any normative judgement intended.

180 were wounded. The government responded to the crisis by declaring a State of Emergency and banned the ANC and PAC shortly thereafter, signalling the Nationalist government's determination to crush political resistance.³ The Rivonia trial and the life imprisonment of the top echelon of ANC leaders on Robben Island in 1964 was a further triumph in the Nationalist government's eyes. Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd's vision of a refined policy of apartheid in the form of separate development, sought to mediate the change sweeping the African continent with a controlled and manipulated form of limited power devolution to the ethnic 'homelands'.

The Black students, whom the state planned to form the backbone of the homelands, were members of churches and of multiple Christian organisations; Black Consciousness leaders Barney Pityana and Steve Biko were prime examples. It was a relationship that was consistent and productive before the establishment of SASO, as well as through its years of growth and subsequent state repression after 1972/1973. The close relationship between Aelred Stubbs and Steve Biko was a powerful example of such a productive partnership.⁴ The historical role of the church in South Africa presents a subtle and intriguing picture of individual spiritual commitments that cut across political and ideological divides. The ecumenical movement provided a reference point from which to understand and come to terms with the challenge of the emergent Black Consciousness movement. The theology of the Kingdom of God provided a means of transcending incompatible national ideals and also provided a vocabulary for articulating aspirations for a just society in the future. Ecumenical endeavour and the organisational matrix it created, with its emphasis on unity and muting of strict orthodoxy, also provided a model and home for more 'secular' oppositional activism in the early and mid-1970s.

South Africa's 'liberal missionary heartland'

Steve Biko and Barney Pityana, two key leaders of Black Consciousness in South Africa, emerged from a particular milieu in the Eastern Cape shaped by powerful historical forces. Among these were the deep historical memories of amaXhosa resistance to settler

³ T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (London and New York: Longman, 1983), 209-10.

⁴ My thanks to Alan Wilkinson for this point on the close relationship between Biko and Stubbs and how Stubbs understood the thrust of Black Consciousness fairly early on. Wilkinson explains the affinity noting that 'the religious sceptic and political dissenter can feel a kinship to Religious who by their calling are also standing against the norms of both society and church.' A. Wilkinson, *The Community of the Resurrection: A Centenary History* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 317.

encroachment,⁵ and powerful millenarian movements such as the Israelites, members of which had been massacred by the Smuts government at Bulhoek in May 1921.⁶ The imprint of more than a century of missionary endeavour was also powerfully present. The Eastern Cape was South Africa's 'liberal missionary heartland,'⁷ proudly showcased by the prestigious institutions of Lovedale and Fort Hare College that had produced such leaders as Robert Sobukwe, Z.K. Matthews, Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela.⁸ These constitutive elements of the Eastern Cape played a powerful role in the unfolding development of Black Consciousness and were relevant to its organic growth.

Black Consciousness reflected its conversation with its interlocutors. The rhetoric of SASO was levelled against 'liberals' and its critique focused on the historic abuses of missionary Christianity. But crucially it was aided and abetted by Christians informed by a particular sense of mission that reached for similar goals. There was a joint concern with the oppressed and a desire for social justice. A social revolution of some form was needed. 'Man' in all his/her ramifications was the concern, and activists reached for the transcendent, what Biko described as the 'quest for a true humanity,' and what theologians and Christians saw realised in the 'Kingdom of God'.

* * *

Pityana hailed from Port Elizabeth. Biko was born in 1946 in Tarkastad, Eastern Cape, and grew up in Ginsberg location near King William's Town. Their association began at school where they shared a desk at the historic Lovedale mission school,⁹ situated at Alice in the Eastern Cape and originally founded by the Glasgow Missionary Society. In 1963 Biko was expelled after being detained by the police along with his brother, Khaya, for suspected connections with the PAC armed wing *Pogo*. Steve was soon released but Khaya

⁵ For histories see J.B. Peires, *The House of Phalo: A History of the Xhosa People in the Days of Their Independence* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1982); C. Crais, *White Supremacy and Black Resistance in Pre-Industrial South Africa: The Making of the Colonial Order in the Eastern Cape, 1770-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992); C. Crais, *The Politics of Evil: Magic, Power and the Political Imagination in South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); A. Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001).

⁶ See Edgar and Sapire, *African apocalypse*.

⁷ D. Thomas, *Christ Divided: Liberalism, Ecumenism, and Race in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2002), 93.

⁸ For a history of the founding of Lovedale and Fort Hare, see D. Burchell 'African Higher Education and the establishment of the South African Native College, Fort Hare,' *South African Historical Journal*, 8 (November 1976), 60 – 83.

⁹ B. Pityana, 'Reflections on 30 Years since the Death of Steve Biko: A Legacy Revisited,' 2. National Arts Festival Winter School lecture, 3 July 2007. Found at: http://www.unisa.ac.za/contents/about/principle/docs/Steve%20Biko%20Lecture%202007%20doc%20final%202_2.pdf (accessed on 29 January 2009).

‘disappeared’ for ten months, was charged and then acquitted on appeal.¹⁰ Steve Biko’s detention by the police and his unfair dismissal from Lovedale was ‘a very bitter experience’ which laid the seeds of an abiding antipathy to authority.¹¹ Pityana was also expelled from the school in 1964 for taking part in a student strike. In 1964 after missing an entire school year, Steve Biko moved to the Catholic St. Francis’s College, situated at Marianhill, in Natal.¹² He showed his critical turn of mind there by openly challenging his tutors on the improbabilities of the virgin birth of Christ¹³ as well as fighting ‘many wars’ with the school authorities.¹⁴

While at St. Francis’s as a young high school student, Biko wrote to Fr. Aelred Stubbs. Stubbs served as principal of the Anglican seminary for black students at St Peter’s College, at the Federal Theological Seminary, based in Alice.¹⁵ He had initially come across the Biko family as part of his pastoral work in Ginsberg location at the time of the brothers’ arrest.¹⁶ He became a close friend to both Biko and Pityana. David Russell, another CR member, was also a confidant of Biko. Russell was South African born, the son of a United Party MP who later left the party to found the Progressive Party in 1959.¹⁷ Educated first at Bishops High School, Russell studied at the University of Cape Town and read history at Oxford University. He entered the Community of the Resurrection’s Mirfield Seminary in Yorkshire while in England, where he was strongly influenced by the writings of Gandhi and the French contemplative Charles de Foucauld, before he returned to South Africa with the CR.¹⁸ Though not strictly ecumenicists, Stubbs and Russell’s theological commitments were ecumenical in the broader sense that their Christian commitment led them to side with the oppressed.

In contrast to Biko’s open questioning of orthodox Christian belief, Pityana remained a ‘deeply committed Christian,’ as well as a member of the Anglican Church.¹⁹ When Pityana

¹⁰ L. Wilson, ‘Bantu Stephen Biko: A Life,’ in Pityana et al., *Bounds of Possibility*, 19.

¹¹ Biko interview with Gail Gerhart, cited in Wilson, ‘Biko: A Life,’ *cit.*, 19.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ A. Stubbs, ‘Martyr of Hope,’ in Biko, *I Write*, 239.

¹⁴ Wilson, ‘Biko: A Life,’ 20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Walshe, *Church versus State*, 132.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Stubbs, ‘Martyr of Hope,’ 178.

left South Africa in 1978 he took a position with the WCC's Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) in Geneva. Biko and Pityana shared their Christian upbringing with a sizeable number of the African population of South Africa by 1970; Thomas estimates two thirds of Africans had converted, in the wake of a leap in African conversion over the preceding fifty years. This was fruit of the consolidation of the Anglican and Methodist churches in the urban areas and their dominance of the mission schools.²⁰

Biko's and Pityana's rejection of white liberalism and their critique of its liberal Christian counterpart also constituted a challenge to the formative influence of liberal missionary Christianity on their own lives. As men schooled in the liberal crucible of Lovedale and, for Pityana, at Fort Hare College, they were well-placed to judge the gulf between liberal ideals and actions. Although it had been cut short, their education in their formative years was marked on them. Looking back at his school experience several years later, Biko adopted a generic tone to describe personal experience: 'No wonder the African child learns to hate his heritage in his days at school. So negative is the image presented to him that he tends to find solace only in close identification with the white society'.²¹ His critique extended to Christianity, which in South Africa was based on 'the rotten foundation' which the bulk of the missionaries had 'created when they came'.²² Pityana had remained an Anglican, for which he was later nicknamed 'Bishop' by his Black Consciousness comrades.²³ Biko retained vestiges of the liberal heritage and when he first enrolled in the then University of Natal Non-European Section (UNNE) he was still committed to multiracial liberalism, describing himself as a 'NUSAS man' for his first year on campus.²⁴

Both men's religious connections were facilitative in other ways. Pityana and Biko were both members of the Anglican Students' Federation (ASF) and, later, the University Christian Movement (UCM) as students. After Biko's expulsion from Lovedale, Biko and Pityana met again at an ASF conference at the private boys' school Michaelhouse in the Natal Midlands.²⁵ The relative protection offered by the denominational society enabled Biko and Pityana to meet again under its aegis. By 1964 both the ASF and the National Catholic

²⁰ Thomas, *Christ Divided*, xiv – xv.

²¹ Biko, *I Write*, 32.

²² *Ibid.*, 33.

²³ Magaziner, 'From Students to Prophets'.

²⁴ Gerhart, 'Interview with Steve Biko,' in Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives!*, 26.

²⁵ Pityana, 'Reflections on 30 Years since the Death of Steve Biko,' 2.

Federation of Students (NCFS) had a 'significant presence' ²⁶ on most of the segregated universities set up by the 1959 Extension of University Education Act. In July 1968 Pityana and Biko attended the UCM conference at Stutterheim, just north of King William's Town. There they led the caucus of black student leaders that agreed to work towards a conference with a specific focus on black students. The founding conference of the new black-only student organisation, SASO, took place at Biko's *alma mater* St Francis's College in December 1968. Pityana was made president of the ASF in the same year.²⁷ The following year, in July 1969, SASO was officially launched at the University of the North, Turfloop.

The Context of the Ecumenical Movement

'Ecumenism' can be defined as the ideal of Christian unity and the adjective 'ecumenical' refers to that which represents 'a whole body of Churches'.²⁸ The term derives from the Greek word *oikoumenē* which translates as 'the inhabited world'.²⁹ The term's etymology thus paired the imperative for Christian unity with responsibility to the 'inhabited world', a widening of concern that the WCC strongly embraced in the 1960s. Whereas theological consultation between church hierarchies in South Africa moved at 'glacier speed', as a contemporary observer put it, students took the initiative in the areas of ecumenical endeavour that focused on 'justice and unity'.³⁰ Christian student organisations functioned as networks connecting local experience to an international context. In order to understand the significance of the ecumenical movement for the 1960s and 1970s, it is helpful to examine its early relationship with South Africa as a catalyst for ecumenical endeavour in the country, and impliedly for greater social justice.

The modern ecumenical movement gained its first impetus from students. John R. Mott of Postville, Iowa, was the towering and dominant figure, involved in a nexus of organisations, including the Student Volunteer Movement, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and the World's Student Christian Federation (WSCF). As Mott recorded in a pamphlet in 1892, the initial Student Volunteer Movement was born out of a

²⁶ C. Collins, 'The Birth of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa,' *WSCF Journal*, 1, 2 (1979), 27.

²⁷ A. Stubbs, 'The Story of Nyameko Barney Pityana,' *South African Outlook*, (October 1979), cited in Maimela, 'Black Consciousness and White Liberals,' 174.

²⁸ *The Penguin English Dictionary* (London: Penguin Books, 2000).

²⁹ From the Greek *oikos*, house. *Ibid*.

³⁰ Collins, 'Birth of Black Consciousness,' 27.

‘spirit of revival which was then sweeping through the Eastern colleges [of the United States]’ in the early 19th century, inspired by accounts of the first missionary societies based in England.³¹ The watchword for the volunteers of the new movement was no less than ‘*the evangelization of the world in this generation*’.³² In South Africa, Rose J. Sears, inspired by reading accounts of the Student Volunteer Movement in the United States, organised three groups of volunteers at the Huguenot Seminary at Wellington in the Cape Colony.³³

In August 1895 Mott established the World’s Student Christian Fellowship (WSCF). As an international body its purpose was to link the efforts of national student Christian movements. The establishment of the WSCF had significant implications for South Africa.³⁴ The international body was the driving force behind the formation, just one year following, of the Student Christian Association Movement in South Africa in 1896. In the same year, the co-founder of the YMCA, Luther Wishard, and the leader of the British Student Movement, Donald Fraser, arrived in South Africa to help establish the fledgling ecumenical body. The new organisation held great promise for conciliation between English and Dutch students, and its founding conference was in Stellenbosch, a ‘centre of Dutch culture and intellectual life’.³⁵

Just three years after the new organisation had been established it was threatened by the divisions of the South African War (1899 – 1902). The war was hugely costly and devastated the countryside, and left a deep antipathy between English and Dutch/Afrikaner. In the aftermath of the war delegates of the SCA to the Zeist WSCF Conference in the Netherlands, persuaded Mott to visit South Africa and support the cause of post-war reconciliation. Mott arrived in 1906 where he gave a powerful speech at the Student Missionary Conference in Cape Town’s Huguenot Hall.³⁶ His speech to the assembled students and church leaders was a spur to local Christian awareness, effectively linking ‘South

³¹ J.R. Mott, ‘Early History of the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions,’ in J.R. Mott, *Addresses and Papers of John R. Mott. Volume One: The Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions* (New York: Association Press, 1946), 3.

³² *Ibid.*, 15. Emphasis in the original.

³³ *Ibid.* For more on the Huguenot Seminary see new research in S. Duff, ‘From New Women to College Girls at the Huguenot Seminary and College, 1895-1910,’ *Historia*, 51, 1 (May 2006), 1 – 27. See also S. Duff, ‘What will this child be? Dutch Reformed Evangelicalism and Childhood in the Cape Colony, 1860-1898,’ (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, forthcoming).

³⁴ C.H. Hopkins, *John R. Mott, 1865-1955: a biography* (Eerdmans, 1955). By 1902, in a report to the Fourth International Convention in Toronto, the executive reported that the WSCF included 1500 student Christian organizations and a total of 70 000 students worldwide. Mott, *The Student Volunteer Movement*, 83.

³⁵ Mott, *The Student Volunteer Movement*, 109.

³⁶ G. Setiloane, ‘The ecumenical movement in Africa: from mission church to moratorium,’ in C. Villa-Vicencio and J.W. De Gruchy (eds.), *Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naude* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 138.

African church life with world Christian thinking and developments’ and specifically ‘the development of an ecumenical consciousness’.³⁷ During his visit in June 1906, Mott wrote that South Africa was ‘one of the most difficult and interesting fields’ he had ever visited, and that he had never encountered a ‘more bafflingly complex situation’, where bitterness existed between English and Dutch, and the presence of a large, growing native population was complicated by large numbers of ‘Indians, Malays and Chinese’.³⁸ In 1914 Mott observed approvingly, however, that the Volunteer Movement in South Africa had ‘enrolled over 300 volunteers, of whom nearly 100 have gone to the mission field’.³⁹ The longer term result of Mott’s visit was a determination to pursue Christian cooperation and his second visit to Africa in 1934, together with the formation of the International Missionary Council (IMC), led to the formation of the Christian Council of South Africa in Bloemfontein in 1936.⁴⁰

The SCA established a record of service ‘to all races’ that lasted from 1902 until the SCA’s demise in 1965.⁴¹ De Gruchy writes that the SCA with its motto ‘Make Christ King’ successfully brought together races and cultures ‘in one fellowship of worship and service’ and was an exemplar of an evangelical tradition in South Africa, which included names like Andrew Murray Jr., B.B. Keet, Jan Hofmeyr and Alan Paton.⁴²

The Student Christian Association and the Fallacy of ‘the Bridge’

Although the SCA had an inclusive ethos, it carried out its work among European and African students separately. In the 1920s the SCA felt optimistic that this dual work among European and African students, was an important contribution in itself to the

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ J.R. Mott, *Addresses and Papers of John R. Mott. Volume Two: The World's Christian Student Federation* (New York: Association Press, 1947), 484.

³⁹ Mott, *The Student Volunteer Movement*.

⁴⁰ The Christian Council of South Africa became the South African Council of Churches in 1968. J.W. De Gruchy, ‘Grappling with a Colonial Heritage: The English-speaking Churches under Imperialism and Apartheid,’ in R. Elphick, R. Davenport (eds.), *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1997), 158. Thomas contends that among the reasons for the formation of the CCSA were threats to ‘the political fortunes of “colour-blind” liberalism’. Hertzog’s Segregation Bills were passed in 1936. Thomas, *Christ Divided*, 90. Thomas also shows that there was strong crossover in membership of the executives of the Christian Council of South Africa and the SAIRR. Prominent liberals such as Rheinnalt Jones and Dr Edgar Brookes served as representatives of the SAIRR on the CCSA executive (82 – 83).

⁴¹ ‘Student Movements in South Africa: A study of three student movements illustrating student problems and the Government’s response,’ Paper prepared by the Southern Africa Committee of the University Christian Movement, New York, May 1970. Found at: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/misc/stude123.html> (accessed on 23 March 2008).

⁴² De Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa*, 200.

resolution of 'the gulf between black and white in South Africa'.⁴³ Reflecting a swell of liberal hope, the African section of the SCA hosted a conference at Fort Hare College in 1930, addressed by the leading liberal politician, Jan Hendrik Hofmeyr. At the conference European delegates voted to share meals with their African hosts and the students played sports together. The challenge to 'custom' was heightened as whites were in the minority, guests of articulate African students who challenged them on social issues of the day such as industrialisation and race relations. The conference evoked agitation from the white press, who worried that such gatherings 'endangered white civilisation' and chided the students who had apparently 'lost their heads'.⁴⁴ NUSAS welcomed the Fort Hare Conference, which it deemed, was a source from which 'new life flowed,' indicative of 'dynamic forces' that were 'looking toward a new order of society'.⁴⁵ By 1939, the SCA had a total of 280 branches and 9000 members.⁴⁶ In the 1940s the SCA started to serve Indian and Coloured students as well. With the victory of the Nationalist Party in 1948 and the apparent triumph of segregation, the SCA held a conference in 1951 to address 'Race Relations in South Africa'. Although presciently opposed by its African secretary, the SCA conference voted to set up 'four distinct sections' of 'English, Afrikaner, Bantu, and Coloured'. It was a structure that was inherently flawed and thus set for failure.

The SCA had been spurred by foreign student volunteers and was linked to the global ecumenical movement. Critical tensions were to come to the fore for the SCA in the mid-1960s, as the government reached a high point of enforcing apartheid, and as world opinion mobilised against South Africa in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre of 21 March 1960. In immediate response to Sharpeville, the WCC bypassed the CCSA and called for a consultation with the South African churches (the WCC had prepared plans for such a consultation before Sharpeville happened, in the face of a moribund CCSA). The consultation took place at the Cottesloe residences of the University of Witwatersrand, outside Johannesburg, in December 1960. Sharpeville and Cottesloe were watershed moments for South Africa and its churches. By the end of the consultation the delegates, including those from the Dutch Reformed churches, agreed to the final statement that recognised the entitlement of all people regardless of race, to land ownership and political

⁴³ *Federation News Sheet* (February 1926), cited in 'Student Movements in South Africa'.

⁴⁴ *Federation News Sheet* (December 1930), cited in 'Student Movements in South Africa'.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ 'Student Movements in South Africa'

rights in South Africa. The final report read, 'We recognise that all racial groups who permanently inhabit our country as a part of our total population... Members of all these groups have an equal right to make their contribution towards the enrichment of the life of their country'.⁴⁷

The Cottesloe statement 'amounted to the rejection of some of the central emphases of the apartheid policy of the time'.⁴⁸ Specifically, it 'affirmed that all racial groups were eligible for the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship. It rejected segregation in the church and the government's prohibition of racially mixed marriages; it criticized the migrant labour system and job reservation... and it affirmed the right of all people to own land'.⁴⁹ Visser 't Hooft's report on Cottesloe to the Central Committee of the WCC was further revealing. In the report he stressed that the consultation set a pattern for ecumenical mission, where dialogue addressed not only Christian unity but social justice as well. 'Our hope must be,' he emphasised, 'that through such a meeting of minds we will not only help to create more real ecumenical fellowship between the churches of all races in South Africa and between them and the World Council of Churches, but also and especially make a substantial contribution to the cause of justice and freedom for all races of mankind'.⁵⁰

The last provision of the consultation emphasised the relationship of the Church to nationalism; nationalism it judged, was a legitimate goal of self-realization. Yet, nationalism posed a danger when it sought to fulfil its aims at the expense of others, making the nation an 'absolute value' above God. The role of the Church was therefore to 'help direct national movements towards just and worthy ends'.⁵¹ No resolution could have been more pressing for South Africa.

* * *

The response of the South African government to Cottesloe was swift. Prime Minister Verwoerd called the Dutch Reformed delegates to order and accused them of 'allowing themselves to be influenced by the WCC and forgetting their responsibility to the

⁴⁷ A. J. van der Bent (ed.), *Breaking Down Walls: World Council of Churches Statements and Actions on Racism, 1948 - 1985* (Geneva: Programme to Combat Racism, World Council of Churches, 1986), 24.

⁴⁸ Villa-Vicencio, *Between Christ and Caesar*, 200.

⁴⁹ J. W. De Gruchy, 'Grappling with a Colonial Heritage: The English-speaking Churches under Imperialism and Apartheid,' in Elphick and Davenport, *Christianity in South Africa*, 162.

⁵⁰ Cited in E. Castro, 'Foreword,' in Pityana et al., *Bounds of Possibility*, vii.

⁵¹ Van der Bent, *Breaking Down Walls*, 26.

“high purpose of apartheid””.⁵² After the consultation most of the Dutch Reformed delegates were either dismissed by their church synods, or were forced to retract their support of the final statement.

Tensions within the SCA also simmered in the wake of the consultation. In the Western Cape, theological and political disagreement became more pronounced as students narrowed their concern to exclude ‘politics’ and searched for a conservative alternate international affiliation to the WSCF.⁵³ An SCA delegation to the WSCF conference in Strasbourg in 1961 refused to condemn apartheid policy outright. They argued that the SCA was attempting to peacefully negotiate ‘two types of nationalism’. While Sharpeville had led to an international outcry against the South African government, the South African SCA delegation stressed the need to see the complexity of the political situation. As they saw it, apartheid did not represent outright oppression of African rights. It was, rather, a means of facilitating essentially incompatible national ideals. Bearing in mind the complexity of its religious and social composition, the SCA delegation argued that ‘As an SCA which has in its fellowship people from these groups, we face the situation as men and women seeking... seeking to have more and more traffic on the bridge which the SCA is seeking to be, as the only movement in South Africa which includes all shades of political thinking and religious conviction’.⁵⁴ The SCA as an ecumenical organisation, with an ethos of cooperation and dialogue, existed in a country in which so-called ‘racial’ difference was central to the ideology of apartheid.

The SCA delegates’ not entirely clear position led to strong censure from WSCF leaders. In a letter to the SCA, the WSCF charged that they had failed to dissociate themselves ‘in word and act from the policy of apartheid’.⁵⁵ The policy of apartheid had ‘become a threat to world peace and will, if it continues much longer, end in a bloodbath which may have a chain reaction all over the continent and beyond’.⁵⁶ In a second letter, addressed to other affiliate movements around the world, the WSCF asked their respective governments to ‘apply massive pressure to compel a radical change in South African policy’.⁵⁷

⁵² Villa-Vicencio, *Between Christ and Caesar*, 200.

⁵³ W.J. Houston, ‘A Critical Evaluation of the University Christian Movement as an Ecumenical Mission to Students, 1967 – 1972’ (M.Th. thesis, University of South Africa, 1997), 3 – 7.

⁵⁴ *Federation News Sheet* (July 1961), cited in ‘Student Movements in South Africa’.

⁵⁵ ‘Student Movements in South Africa’.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

The SCA in turn rejected the WSCF position, which it accused of overstepping its function and becoming ‘a superstructure,’ that was ‘enforcing the will of the majority on the minority’⁵⁸ and dissociated itself from the international body. In 1965 the SCA disbanded, splintered into its four independent sections: Afrikaans, English, Bantu and Coloured.

The SCA argument that their organisation functioned as a bridge across which members of opposed groups could meet had missed the point. The polarisation imposed by apartheid necessitated a choosing of sides. It was in the aftermath of the dissolution of the SCA and in the light of the findings of the Cottesloe Consultation, that the Churches in South Africa were forced to come to terms with the challenge presented to their fundamentals of belief. In forming a new ecumenical student organisation, some new impetus was given to a revaluation and re-examination of belief and praxis.

The World's Student Christian Federation and the Imperative of Radical Change

The theological ballast that undergirded the WSCF stance on apartheid was shaped by the Christian Socialism of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It was a movement that had already directly impacted South Africa. In the mid-nineteenth century Frederick Denison Maurice, leader of the Anglican Christian Socialist movement in England had strongly influenced the thinking of the ‘heretical’ Bishop of Natal, John William Colenso. Maurice’s writings convinced Colenso of ‘the significance of missionary endeavour’, the purpose of which was to work ‘towards revealing the light already in all men’.⁵⁹ Christian Socialism arose as a response to the critique of Marxism and its social gospel was offered as an alternative to the violence of a proletarian revolution.⁶⁰ Christian Socialism also influenced Charles Gore who founded the Community of the Resurrection in 1892, and drew renewed attention to the Incarnation and God’s identification with the suffering of humanity.⁶¹

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ J. Guy, *The Heretic: A Study of the Life of John William Colenso 1814 – 1883* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press; Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1983), 25.

⁶⁰ S.S. Maimela, ‘Christian Socialism as Precursor of Liberation Theology,’ *Journal of Black Theology*, 3, 2 (1989), 18. For a more critical engagement with Christian Socialism, see J. Cochrane, *Servants of Power: The Role of English-Speaking 1903 – 1930* (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1987).

⁶¹ A. Wilkinson, *The Community of the Resurrection*.

In Europe, Albrecht Ritschl and his disciple, Adolf von Hamack, emphasised the importance of the ‘idea of the Kingdom of God as the key element in the teaching of Jesus’.⁶² Their approach challenged the anthropocentric emphasis of evangelical thought that placed individual salvation at the centre of Christian theology, and shifted theological attention to the utopian Biblical mandate of economic and social justice. Material life on earth was significant, as was the coming Kingdom of God and individual salvation.

In America proponents of the social gospel called for radical social change.⁶³ Walter Rauschenbush was a powerful leader and published *A Theology for the Social Gospel* in 1917.⁶⁴ The emergence of the social gospel and advocates such as Maurice, Albrecht Ritschl (1822 – 1889), Adolf von Harnack (1851 – 1930) and Walter Rauschenbusch (1861 – 1918) represented an early response to the social and political misuses of Christianity in the age of industrialisation. The social gospel shaped the conscience of the 20th century ecumenical movement and anticipated the emergence of liberation theology from the ‘Third World’ in the 1960s.⁶⁵ With the turn to the social gospel, the focus of the WCC shifted from worldwide evangelisation ‘in their generation’ to worldwide social justice.

Post-war Christianity was further influenced by the two definitive ecumenical developments of the 1960s: the Second Vatican Council from 1962 to 1965 and the WCC Conference on ‘Church and Society’ in Geneva in 1966. The modernisation of the Vatican brought the Catholic Church in South Africa into closer cooperation with the English-speaking Churches.⁶⁶ This ‘*rapprochement*’ was reflected when the Catholic Church ‘moved into observer membership’ with the Christian Council of South Africa (CCSA) in 1966.⁶⁷ The WCC Geneva conference went a step further than Vatican II and encouraged Christians to become directly involved in the struggles for justice in the world. After the Notting Hill consultation on Racism in London in 1969, the WCC founded the Programme to Combat

⁶² Maimela, ‘Christian Socialism,’ 22.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Maimela, ‘Christian Socialism,’ 23. De Gruchy, *The Church Struggle*, 200.

⁶⁵ Maimela, ‘Christian Socialism,’ 26.

⁶⁶ De Gruchy, ‘Grappling with a Colonial Heritage,’ 163. The English-speaking Churches include the Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregational, and Baptist Churches. Philippe Denis writes, ‘[i]n the 1960s the proud aloofness which had characterised South African Catholicism since the establishment of the church in the nineteenth century gradually gave way to a genuine willingness to cooperate with other Christian churches in the field of ministry, education and political activism. On the Protestant side perceptions changed as well. Traditionally regarded as the *Roomse gevaar*, the Catholic Church came to be seen as a partner in the ecumenical dialogue. The Second Vatican Council attracted attention in the whole theological community.’ P. Denis, *The Dominican Friars in Southern Africa: a Social History, 1557 – 1990* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 183–4.

⁶⁷ Thomas, *Christ Divided*, 165.

Racism (PCR) to provide financial support to the liberation movements of the 'Third World', particularly those of southern Africa, ostensibly for humanitarian projects and not direct military aid.⁶⁸

Visser 't Hooft spelt out the implications of the Geneva conference in a booklet published by the BBC, *Christians for the Future* in 1967. The new vision embraced pluralism, which was a means of restoring the Church to its correct place in society. Bearing in mind the historic abuses of authority by organised religion, pluralism meant that 'no Church, no philosophy can run the show. The Church is thrown back on its true task. It can only live as a servant-Church. That does not mean a withdrawal from society, but it means a different form of presence in society'.⁶⁹ The new Christian vision eschewed cultural imperialism: 'Our generation has, without the slightest doubt, once again to make Christianity indigenous in the new cultural situation.' It followed that Christians could not 'maintain in our present environment the formulation of the faith which has taken shape in earlier centuries'.⁷⁰ The Christian message needed to be interpreted anew.

In contrast to Marx's critique of religion as opiate and ephemeral 'aroma,' Visser 't Hooft argued that genuine Christianity was exactly its opposite. Authentic Christianity was 'an explosive, revolutionary force' which challenged the world order of increasing wealth disparity and injustice. It demanded of individual Christians 'to choose between the spiritual-aroma religion and the prophetic faith concerned with justice for all men'.⁷¹ The mission of the Church was in short to 'humanize the future,' to bring it into line with the Kingdom of God. This kingdom had significant implications for the more immediate future. It 'is not simply the dispensation which comes *after* the conclusion of the historical process in which we are involved'; rather it was a future that was brought about through active agency, 'whenever men obey the divine call'.⁷²

Visser 't Hooft was a link of continuity with the past for the ecumenical movement. He had worked in 1926 as a personal assistant to John Mott, from whom he learnt 'the art of running a complicated world conference'.⁷³ Visser 't Hooft visited South Africa in 1952 for

⁶⁸ De Gruchy, 'Grappling with a Colonial Heritage,' 163.

⁶⁹ Visser 't Hooft, *Christians for the Future*, 9-10.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 24.

⁷³ W.A. Visser 't Hooft, *Memoirs* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), 21.

five weeks where he spoke to representatives of the 'main sections'⁷⁴ of the country. Together with Chief Albert Luthuli and Arthur Blaxall of the CCSA, he visited Manilal Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, at the Phoenix settlement near Durban established by the Mahatma in 1904.⁷⁵

In 1968, a year after Visser 't Hooft published his vision of a revitalized ecumenical Christianity, the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the Christian Institute released their *Message to the People of South Africa*. Consciously modelled on the Barmen Declaration of the German Confessing Church of 1934, the *Message* condemned the central tenets of apartheid and asserted that Christians were answerable to a higher authority than the state. The publication of the *Message* drew the SACC and Christian Institute into a new stage of confrontation with apartheid and signalled a 'new phase in the life of the SACC and its member churches'.⁷⁶

The founding of the UCM and the birth of SASO

The University Christian Movement (UCM) was founded in 1967 to fill the void left by the SCA and in response to the perceived need by the ecumenical Churches 'for a new student Christian movement'.⁷⁷ Colin Collins was the national chaplain of the NCFS and consequently had 'a wide range of contacts in the black colleges',⁷⁸ and was part of the early negotiations. Collins was born in King William's Town in 1928 and completed a Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Pretoria in 1954.⁷⁹ Before his NCFS chaplaincy he had served as General Secretary of the South African Catholic Bishops Conference.⁸⁰ As he remembers, the call to found a new organisation emerged more or less as soon as the SCA break-up became effective in 1965. The result was the formation of 'new alliances' among young South

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 278. Visser 't Hooft also remarked that 'each of these groups seemed to live in its own closed world and there was practically no dialogue or communication between them'. *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 281.

⁷⁶ F. Chikane, 'A Critical Examination of the Theology and Praxis of the SACC, 1968-1988,' (M.A. thesis, University of Natal, 1992), 58.

⁷⁷ 'Student Movements in South Africa'

⁷⁸ Walshe, *Church versus State*, 81.

⁷⁹ C.B. Collins, 'The Ideas of Paulo Freire and an Analysis of Black Consciousness in South Africa,' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1974).

⁸⁰ Walshe, *Church versus State*, 81.

Africans, 'most of whom were in their twenties or early thirties' who had been 'shocked' by the Sharpeville massacre.⁸¹

Although the UCM was founded in response to the break-up of the SCA, plans for a new ecumenical organisation were underway well before 1967. The ecumenical churches belonging to the CCSA 'foresaw the inevitable demise of the SCA', and began preparation as early as 1963 for the SCA's English Medium Work to affiliate to the CCSA through its youth department.⁸² The ecumenical churches supported the formation of the new ecumenical organisation, which facilitated what Collins saw as the 'original thrust to form the UCM' from the Protestants and Catholics who 'sought to find a meaning to unity and social justice in a racially divided South Africa'.⁸³ The logic that drove the meetings was a 'fairly simple belief in a multi-racial society, a desire to bring students together to promote this end and an acceptance that this could only be done across denominational lines in an ecumenical movement'.⁸⁴ The members organised meetings through the course of 1966, which culminated in a conference in December at Rossettenville, Johannesburg. The inaugural UCM conference took place in Grahamstown in July 1967, with the support of the Anglican, Methodist, Congregational and Presbyterian Churches fully behind it.⁸⁵ Collins was appointed General Secretary and the Rev. Basil Moore, a Methodist clergyman, and academic in the theology department at Rhodes University, was elected President.⁸⁶

The need for an organisation such as the UCM extended beyond being a replacement for the old SCA; by the late 1960s the Government had comprehensively imposed Bantu Education. All of the churches, bar the Catholics, had relinquished their schools to government control. As a result, black students at the universities set up by the government suffered from an acute sense of isolation. Karis and Gerhart emphasise that 'The new black universities set up after 1959 were taking shape in a climate of isolation and repression, and their students were trying to reach out to one another and develop lines of communication across the country'.⁸⁷ The UCM provided a vital means to facilitate this process. The UCM

⁸¹ Collins, 'Birth of the Black Consciousness Movement,' 28.

⁸² Houston, 'University Christian Movement as an Ecumenical Mission to Students,' 7.

⁸³ Collins, 'Birth of the Black Consciousness Movement,' 28

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Walshe, *Church versus State*, 81.

⁸⁷ Karis and Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence*, 74.

was itself transformed as the various denominational groups ‘provided a ready-made constituency which was predominantly black’.⁸⁸ The leadership of Moore and Collins, and a large and assertive black membership which produced leaders Sabelo Stanley Ntwasa and Justice Moloto, led the UCM to greater radicalism. Responsive to the changes taking place in the student world of the 1960s the UCM leaders looked to be ‘relevant’ in their situation. Their theological explorations were significantly taken forward under the aegis of the Black Theology project (examined in chapter five).⁸⁹

The UCM was short-lived as an organisation. It was disbanded by its executive on 11 July 1972 in the face of looming government action. Prime Minister John Vorster initiated a commission of inquiry on 10 February 1972, officially titled *A Commission of Inquiry into Certain Organisations* and headed by A.L. Schlebusch⁹⁰ to investigate the activities of the Christian Institute, the University Christian Movement, the South African Institute of Race Relations and the National Union of South African Students.⁹¹ The action of the Schlebusch Commission against the Christian Institute and the University Christian Movement, both under suspicion as ‘affected organisations,’ was the first overt action by the state against the Church. Although the English-speaking churches had become increasingly critical of state policies, the state had until this point allowed the churches a measure of freedom.

* * *

The multiracial approach of the UCM sat uneasily with the leaders of newly-formed SASO. Whereas the UCM was committed to promoting ecumenism among students and was not primarily a liberal organisation, its multiracial policy marked it as such. The first *SASO Newsletter* discerned a lack of political direction in the organisation, a characteristic it judged common of ‘mixed movements’. In comment on the UCM’s annual conference in July 1970 at Wilgespruit, near Johannesburg, a SASO observer dismissed the organisation’s ‘clique theology,’ which was ‘far in advance of the country’s conservative Churches,’ and did not impress its black members.⁹² The remedial stance of SASO was brutal: the UCM was of value only ‘in so far as it still has the machinery and manpower to make black theology’, a remark softened by the recognition of the UCM’s welfare programmes that were of ‘some value’ to

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ See as well D. Magaziner, ‘Christ in Context: Developing a Political Faith in Apartheid South Africa,’ *Radical History Review*, 99 (Fall 2007), 80 – 106.

⁹⁰ Collins, ‘Birth of the Black Consciousness Movement,’ 26.

⁹¹ M. Lobban, *White Man’s Justice: South African Political Trials in the Black Consciousness Era* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 83.

⁹² *SASO Newsletter* (August 1970), 5.

the black students ‘who comprise the majority in UCM’.⁹³ At the July 1970 UCM conference black students outnumbered whites by more than two to one, and they seriously considered withdrawing from UCM, which they accused of ‘nurturing Black inferiority - White superiority attitudes’, dampening black militancy and ‘denying them the chance of nurturing their Black consciousness’.⁹⁴

The following September issue of *SASO Newsletter* coincided with the 1970 WCC decision to fund liberation movements under the aegis of the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR). SASO showed its ambivalence towards the UCM and the furore surrounding the WCC decision, and expressed more interest in the visit of the Labour Party MP Dennis Healey, to whom some of the SASO students were able to speak. The newsletter reproduced the UCM statement on the WCC decision in full, ‘not because they agreed with it, but because we think it is one of the most balanced and objective observations of the implications of the WCC decision.’⁹⁵

The UCM statement directed focus away from the morality of the WCC decision, on which it wished ‘to make no comment,’ and instead pointed out the hypocrisy inherent in the responses of the South African churches; the churches implicitly condoned white aggression against blacks by supporting the structural violence of apartheid, and as taxpayers its own members contributed to South Africa’s growing arms expenditure, without any of the moral censure they brought to bear against the WCC.⁹⁶ For SASO there was ‘very little to add to the UCM statement’; the public debate in the country reinforced their feeling that ‘black opinion is regarded as extremely unimportant’ and the white-controlled churches needed to determine what their ‘overwhelmingly black membership’ really thought.⁹⁷

SASO had chosen to respond to the WCC grants, without of a statement of its own, relying instead on the UCM’s carefully worded press release. SASO’s lack of engagement with the watershed moment of the WCC was left unexplained. There were hints elsewhere though of the reasons. It was self-consciously ‘a secular body’ as the participants in its Transvaal and Natal formation schools recognised.⁹⁸ In spite of its secularism, ‘considerable

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁹⁴ *Sunday Times*, 9 August 1970.

⁹⁵ *SASO Newsletter* (September 1970), 5.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-1.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

time was spent discussing Black Theology and what it entails' and participants 'recognised the functional importance of working closely with other groups in an effort to stress the importance of this topic'.⁹⁹ This pragmatism, which recognised the 'functional importance' of other groups, matched the stance on the UCM adopted in the first newsletter, which reluctantly ascribed the organisation value only so far as it was capable of 'making' Black Theology.

The sequencing was significant; in SASO's tentative first year of existence, Black Consciousness was intended to ameliorate the most obvious symptom of apartheid, the crushed spirit of black dignity. Whereas the first newsletter of SASO contained Biko's essay 'Black Souls in White Skins?' and launched a forceful critique of NUSAS and white liberals, the thrust of the second newsletter turned to 'the spiritual poverty' of the black people which coupled with 'material want... kills' and created 'mountains of obstacles in the normal course of emancipation of the black people'.¹⁰⁰ Biko's analysis in the essay 'We Blacks' discerned the causes to be the loss of black manhood, the denigration of black selfhood through a distorted, European-centred history, and an inflexible and repressive application of Christianity. Black Consciousness was the antidote; it sought to 'show black people the value of their own standards and outlook',¹⁰¹ 'to give positivity in the outlook of the black people to their problems',¹⁰² and 'to talk to the black man in a language that is his own'.¹⁰³ To counteract the shocking 'gullibility' with which black people read their Bibles and to destroy the 'anachronism of a well-meaning God who allows people to suffer continually under an obviously immoral system',¹⁰⁴ the message of the Bible needed to be reinterpreted, and black theology was the sorely needed corrective. Its purpose was to depict 'Jesus as a fighting God who saw the exchange of Roman money – the oppressor's coinage – in his father's temple as so sacrilegious that it merited a violent reaction from Him – the Son of Man'.¹⁰⁵ Theology needed to be made relevant.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Parallel Movements/Institutional Allies: the ASF and NCFS

SASO's expressed scorn for 'mixed movements' extended by definition to the UCM's denominational parents, the ASF and NCFS. Both organisations had a longer organisational lineage than the UCM and both escaped the state's censure in the Schlebusch commission. By exploring the radicalism of these organisations, the historical context of SASO's emergence is made more complex. NUSAS and SASO were complemented and challenged by the ASF and NCFS, as the latter organisations chose to take a political stand, which was seen as an organic outgrowth of their Christianity. Leaders such as Colin Collins and Anglican chaplain to the University of Witwatersrand, John Davies, played a supportive role and provided resources and assistance to black students. As noted, both Biko and Pityana were members of the ASF early in their university careers. Pityana maintained his links with the ASF after the formation of SASO, served as its president in 1970 and attended ASF conferences in the same year.¹⁰⁶

The ASF offered ideological flexibility. Early radicalism was evident in the ASF *Newsletter*. In an article published in 1963, liberal student leader Francis Wilson drew on avant-garde European theology and philosophy in an article titled 'Les Main Sales'. Translated as 'Dirty Hands,' Wilson's title was taken from Sartre's play, which dealt 'with the conflict, in the mind of an idealistic young Communist, between his conscience and the decisions which his political involvement forces him to make'.¹⁰⁷ Through the article, Wilson sought to inject some of the existentialist angst and ferment of Europe into the readership of the *ASF Newsletter*. Wilson drew on Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the Lutheran theologian and pastor martyred by the Nazis in 1945. Wilson regarded Bonhoeffer's posthumously published *Letters and Papers from Prison* to be 'a must for any Christian student body'.¹⁰⁸ As he explained, Bonhoeffer contended that God had been 'pushed to the edges of life'. Religion was no longer a necessary hypothesis for explaining the mysteries of life, which modern technology had increasingly uncovered. The world had 'come of age'.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Church of the Province of South Africa Archives [hereafter CPSA], Cullen Library, University of Witwatersrand, AB1626/ C1 ASF Correspondence, Letter from G. Muller to B. Pityana, 1970/71? Re minutes/finances.

¹⁰⁷ CPSA AB1626/ F, ASF Miscellaneous 1962, 1968-1970, F. Wilson 'Les Maines Sales,' *ASF Newsletter*, 1963.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* Emphasis in the original.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

Wilson's article was published in the same year that Naudé founded the Christian Institute, and anticipated the close focus on the German Confessing Church and the German 'Church struggle' that developed in the pages of the Christian journal *Pro Veritate* through the course of the 1960s. In the same year, the Anglican Bishop of Woolwich, John Robinson, published *Honest to God* in England, which popularised the work of Bonhoeffer. Together with Harvard theologian, Harvey Cox, who published *The Secular City* (1965), and Paul van Buren who had stimulated the so-called 'God is Dead debate', they popularised a 'secular theology'.¹¹⁰ Through his intervention, Wilson had brought his readers to the cutting-edge of world theological debate. His use of Bonhoeffer and Sartre were intended to instil boldness in Christian students, as opposed to the closeted, 'non-political' nature of institutional Christianity. For Wilson the Church should be, following the former Archbishop of Canterbury William Temple, 'an expeditionary force'.¹¹¹ Christian students needed to become aware of their political capacity and act with courage to engage with what mattered within South African society – political change – and if necessary to get their hands dirtied in the process.

Wilson was an influential liberal student leader who, together with David Welsh, had formed the Student Radical Association at the University of Cape Town in 1961, which was not radical, but named as such due to the 'bias against the term "liberal"' at the time.¹¹² He was the son of Monica Wilson, the distinguished professor of anthropology, and his family had a distinct pedigree of liberal activity in the Eastern Cape, and contribution to liberal historiography. Together with Leonard Thompson, Monica Wilson had edited the two-volume *Oxford History of South Africa* (1969 & 1971) that marked the high point of South African liberal scholarship.¹¹³ Along with Alan Paton she had been lay representative of the Church of the Province of South Africa (Anglican) at the Cottesloe consultation.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰ For a discussion see Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 69-78.

¹¹¹ Wilson, 'Les Maines Sales'.

¹¹² R. Vigne, *Liberals against Apartheid: A History of the Liberal Party of South Africa, 1953-68* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 153.

¹¹³ S. Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge: Science, Sensibility and White South Africa 1820 - 2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 266.

¹¹⁴ A. Paton, *Journey Continued: An Autobiography* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1988), 213. Monica Wilson also edited the autobiography of fellow anthropologist and professor at the University of Fort Hare, Z.K. Matthews, published as Z.K. Matthews, *Freedom for My People: the autobiography of Z.K. Matthews: Southern Africa 1901 to 1968* (London: Rex Collings; Cape Town: David Philip, 1981).

The presence of the ASF on the black campuses, the protection and communication it offered black students between campuses, and the use of its newsletter to disseminate challenging articles, such as Wilson's 'Les Main Sales,' anticipated the more intense role played by the UCM after 1967. Ecumenism in South Africa at an official level made slow progress through the 1960s after the highpoint of Cottesloe and was still closely linked to the missionary liberalism expressed through the CCSA. But within the ASF and its student constituency the social conscience of ecumenism was amplified.

In a letter written in the wake of the demise of the UCM Stephen Hayes, an Anglican priest who had been deported from South West Africa and banned to the Durban area in 1972, identified the strength of the ASF as its willingness to be 'more integrated into the life of the local church'. Hayes saw that a crucial failure of the UCM was 'its tendency to develop a self-consciously 'student' style of Christianity and to divorce itself from the life of the church'.¹¹⁵ The UCM's innovations in student liturgy, aligned Christ with what was 'relevant' to the student of the 1960s, but simultaneously emptied-out the significance of the established Church. In Hayes's opinion, the ASF was vital through its 'indirect influence' on the church as ASF leaders went on to take leadership positions within the Anglican Church. The ASF and NCFS had been left to pick up the pieces after the UCM imploded. The radicalism of Colin Collins and Basil Moore, a Methodist clergyman intimately involved with the UCM, forced them both to leave their Churches, but the Church still remained. Facing the challenges of the time, the Church sought to be 'relevant' by interpreting prominent developments anew. In this process the Church itself was radicalised. As the UCM had forged ahead with a new self-styled student Christianity, it was left to come to terms with its implications for parish and national leadership.

ASF members, however, also showed discomfort with the more radical critiques of the church that were current in student circles. In an address to the 1974 ASF Annual National Conference at St. Peter's College, Fedsem, titled 'Decolonising the Missions', Anthony Barker questioned the out-of-hand criticism of the missionaries as agents of colonialism and reminded his audience of their role in the provision of schooling, healthcare and evangelism. He also voiced his concern about the direction the Student Christian Movement was taking in Britain, 'where the social gospel has totally dwarfed the good news

¹¹⁵ CPSA AB1626/ C1 ASF Correspondence, Letter to 'Mike' from Stephen Hayes, 16 August 1973.

of God'.¹¹⁶ Citing evidence in support of this fear he noted the contents of their magazine, which dealt with 'Chilean revolution, women's lib, deschooling society, [and] with only the most scanty mention of Jesus Christ'.¹¹⁷ The 'danger of secularisation' was even more serious than the government's threatened take-over of Anglican hospitals because it represented a threat from 'within'. It was 'from within themselves that the mission hospitals may lose their vision, and without vision, the people perish'.¹¹⁸ While Barker's concerns were directly in connection with the administration and running of mission hospitals, specifically, the Charles Johnson Memorial Hospital, at Nqutu, in Zululand, they reflected anxiety about a rapidly changing theological environment and the aftermath of the secularisation of belief popularised by the UCM.

* * *

The early 1970s saw the NCFS led the way in developing a radical theology. Their annual conferences, together with the radical direction taken by their newsletter *Katutura*, were 'instrumental' for 'building up the Catholic Left within the NCFS,' and shaping the ideological commitment of Catholic student activism in the remainder of the decade.¹¹⁹ The NCFS was in close contact with the ASF. It was also in regular correspondence with NUSAS and the Christian Institute. A strong motive for the NCFS to keep close contact with the ASF was the access the ASF provided to black campuses. Paradoxically, despite its radical position, the NCFS had lost black support when a caucus of black students split off from the organisation in 1971.¹²⁰ Unlike the NCFS, the ASF had retained its strong black affiliation through the Black Consciousness infused years of the early 1970s, which had offered a powerful challenge to the multiracial UCM.

In an attempt to maintain 'contact' with black campuses the NCFS made continued dialogue with the ASF a priority. Vice-President, Jimmy Radloff, recognised in his 1974 annual report that 'one very important difference [with the NCFS] is that ASF still has a black affiliation. It is in this area that a healthy relationship with ASF will bear fruit... it will

¹¹⁶ CPSA AB1626/ E, ASF Talks 1969-74, A. Barker, 'Decolonising the Missions', Address to ASF Annual Conference, 3 July 1974, 1.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹⁹ A. Egan, 'The politics of a South African Catholic student movement, 1960-1987,' *Communications*, 20 (1991), 65.

¹²⁰ Denis, *The Dominican Friars in Southern Africa*, 262.

be through ASF that contact with black campuses can be forged'.¹²¹ The foregrounding of the relationship between the NCFS and black campuses by 1974 intimated that a distinct radical position had been reached by the organisation.

The NCFS was founded before the Second World War as an association of university chaplaincies, and then 're-established by returning ex-servicemen' following the conclusion of the war.¹²² While in the Catholic Church in South Africa most believers implicitly endorsed the *status quo*,¹²³ involvement in the NCFS allowed some underlying assumptions to be challenged. For instance, the NCFS provided an opportunity for students to come into contact with black South Africans on a basis approaching normality. Encounters with black students 'challenged [white students'] assumptions and helped them form personal bonds of friendship with young black intellectuals,' the result of which was that white students first began to question apartheid.¹²⁴ One such student was Anne Hope, who joined the NCFS in the 1950s as a student at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, where the NCFS's strong social awareness made her aware of 'issues of justice in South Africa'.¹²⁵ This exposure, as well as her later involvement in the Catholic student movement *Pax Romana* while she was studying at Oxford, led Hope to join the Grail movement in 1957 and become trained in Christian Education and Leadership Training (CELT),¹²⁶ which she later used to introduce Biko and Black Consciousness leaders to the radical pedagogy of Paulo Freire in 1972.¹²⁷

The NCFS's social awareness was also facilitated by its university chaplains. The NCFS had an iconoclast as its national chaplain during the mid-1950s. Franciscan friar Didacus Connery, or 'Diego,' as he was widely known to students and fellow priests, had a 'very advanced vision of the church'¹²⁸ and he challenged Catholic students to reflect critically on theology in the light of the political situation. In a way that anticipated the search for 'relevance' in the late 1960s under the auspices of the UCM, Connery drew connections

¹²¹ CPSA AB1626/G, President's Report, Minutes of NCFS Executive Meeting, St. Aidan's, Grahamstown, 31 August – 1 September 1974, Vice-President's Report, 1 – 2.

¹²² A. Egan, 'Catholic intellectuals,' in Brain and Denis, *The Catholic Church in contemporary South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1999), 320.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 321.

¹²⁵ A. Van Schalkwyk, 'Sister, We Bleed and We Sing: Women's Stories, Christian Mission and Shalom in South Africa,' (D.Th. thesis, University of South Africa, 1999), 80.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹²⁷ Maimela, 'Black Consciousness and White Liberals,' 17.

¹²⁸ Egan, 'Catholic intellectuals,' 326

between ‘theology and literature, encouraged liturgical reforms in Masses’ and helped students to see the relationship between ‘the Catholic faith and existentialism, psychology and ethics’.¹²⁹ Unlike Colin Collins, who followed him in the 1960s, Connery only took innovation so far and remained firmly within the church, although together with the NCFS ‘they often pushed themselves as far as possible to the limits of orthodoxy, as it was then understood’.¹³⁰

The NCFS newsletter title, *Katutura*, was a political statement itself. A Herero word that translates ‘We have no permanent resting place here,’¹³¹ the name was shared by a township of forcibly removed refugees, dumped by the South African government outside Windhoek in South West Africa. The title implied a discursive solidarity with that country’s struggle for independence. In 1969 the United Nations Security Council had condemned South Africa for ‘maintaining illegal control over South West Africa in defiance of the United Nations’.¹³² The title also conveyed the newsletter’s aim of unsettling readers. Editor Des Barry sketched out *Katutura*’s aims as fourfold: to disseminate ‘new and radical ideas in order to get people thinking along new lines’; to help readers clarify their personal positions on ‘pertinent issues’; to suggest ‘realistic ways in which people can work for positive change in the church and society’ as well as personal change’; and importantly, to ‘prompt action for change’.¹³³ These aims were encapsulated in the title, as Barry explained: ‘*Katutura*’ entailed ‘a demanding realization... there is no abiding place of rest in the present order’.¹³⁴

Like their secular student counterparts, the editors of *Katutura* were eclectic consumers of international ideas, which could be applied to the local situation. Their ‘synthesis of New Left sympathies and theology’ made it the foremost journal after *Pro Veritate* for promoting a ‘new way of “doing theology”’.¹³⁵ By the 1970s, the newsletter set out to examine the historical roots of Black Consciousness and Black Theology. Speeches from civil rights activists like Martin Luther King Jr. were also included. These publishing

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Katutura* (April/May, 1975), 1.

¹³² M. Horrell, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa: 1969* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1970), 257.

¹³³ CPSA AB1626/G., *Katutura* Editor’s Report, Minutes of NCFS Executive Meeting, St. Aidan’s, Grahamstown, 31 August – 1 September 1974, 3.

¹³⁴ D. Barry, ‘No abiding place of rest,’ *Katutura* (April/May 1975), 1.

¹³⁵ Egan, ‘The politics of a South African Catholic student movement,’ 71.

efforts resulted in the NCFS readership being much better informed than the average lay white Catholic, and some NCFS leaders actively supported the BCM,¹³⁶ a stance taken by some Protestant churchmen as well.

On university campuses NCFS students opted to align themselves with the ‘radicals’ even if this meant conflict with more conservative Catholic students. A Cape Town *Katutura* correspondent emphasised that the NCFS needed to reach out to ‘convert the radicals on our campus to the Church’. Referring to the radical (and Catholic) education theorists Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich,¹³⁷ and South American Catholic priests, Hélder Câmara, Camilo Torres and Hugo Assmann, who were powerful proponents of the liberation theology that did much to influence the Catholic Church in the 1960s, she lamented, ‘I’ve spoken to so many radicals who believe Freire and Illich are communists. They’ve never heard of Camara, Assman [sic] or Camilo Torres. The Church must become identifiable with *real* change... *Katutura* must side with the oppressed... Liberation for the oppressed in SA must be our message’.¹³⁸

The observations of the *Katutura* correspondent showed a curious ignorance on the part of many English speaking students, whose radicalism was a step removed from a prejudiced secularism that dismissed Christianity as irrelevant to modern life. It was through the Church, especially a post-Vatican II Catholic Church, that the ferment of South American radical theology reached South Africa. The drive to align themselves with radicals marked an ideological commitment from the NCFS, which identified socialism as the most Christian economic system.¹³⁹ There was a level of translation involved in communicating their ideals; a repertoire of terms such as a ‘transformed humanity’, a ‘spiritual revolution’ and the ‘kingdom of God’ were readily congruent with the concerns of alienation and the classless, utopian vision of socialism.¹⁴⁰ The distinction was that whereas radical students identified political activity as central to their identities, the NCFS activists’ political engagement grew out of their faith commitment.

With the first wave of bannings against NUSAS activists in 1973, the NCFS decided to risk censure and speak out against the state’s flagrant infringements on the democratic rights of self-expression and protest. At a meeting convened at Pietermaritzburg, home to

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹³⁷ P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1972) and I. Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper Row; London: Calder Boyars, 1971).

¹³⁸ Cited in Egan, ‘The politics of a South African Catholic student movement,’ 75. Emphasis in the original.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

liberal leaders Alan Paton and Peter Brown, in early March of 1973, the NCFS president Tim Dunne, condemned the actions of the government and quoted from banned NUSAS student leader Phillipe Le Roux, in the proscribed magazine, *Dissent*. In so doing Dunne was in contravention of the 1950 Suppression of Communism Act. In a press statement, the NCFS backed the decision of its president and defended his credentials. The statement argued, 'Christianity is not a religion of compromise: Christ did not compromise and neither did his followers in the early church. Christianity implies a rejection of injustice and we see Mr. Dunne's act of defiance as just such a rejection'. Following the clarification of their obedience to Christ, they set the Christian obligation to 'follow the dictates of Christian conscience' over and above the demands of the state, and they called on Christian leaders 'to proclaim this obligation by their public support of Mr. Dunne as an exemplar of obedience to that obligation'.¹⁴¹

By 1975 the NCFS led the way in student Christian radicalism. The newsletter of the SACC noted that the NCFS conference at Stutterheim from 30 June to 6 July produced 'the most radical statements and thinking of any Christian student organisation'.¹⁴² The conference theme, 'Liberation,' was led by the NCFS chaplain, Albert Nolan. Nolan was a fourth-generation South African, born in Cape Town in 1934. Influenced by the writings of the Christian contemplative Thomas Merton, Nolan joined the Dominican Order in 1954 and left South Africa to pursue his doctoral studies in Rome. On his return, he taught theology at the University of Stellenbosch in the 1960s. The conference to which he spoke in 1975 attracted 130 participants from campuses throughout South Africa. The theme addressed overtly political topics that ranged from the compatibility of the capitalist system with Christianity, to 'conscientization' and women's liberation. The conference issued a resolution that followed the Christian Institute's move to condemn capitalism as the economic base of apartheid South Africa, as its values were seen to be 'in conflict with the Kingdom of God'.¹⁴³ The conference further protested against the findings of the Schlebusch commission on the Christian Institute, and the NCFS pledged continued financial assistance to the Institute.

¹⁴¹ CPSA AB1626/G, ASF Cathsoc, NCFS Press statement, 1 May 1973.

¹⁴² *Ecumenical Bulletin*, 22 (16 July 1975), 3.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 4.

The conference to which Nolan spoke specifically dwelt on the theme ‘Christ as liberator in his historical context’.¹⁴⁴ Nolan’s theology considered Jesus as one who ‘challenged the rich to identify in solidarity with the poor’. He thus provided ‘a spirituality of solidarity that resonated with white Catholics seeking a new, progressive direction’.¹⁴⁵ As Nolan explained, solidarity with the poor, summarised in the catchphrase, ‘the option for the poor,’ entailed ‘an uncompromising and unequivocal taking of sides in a situation of structural conflict’.¹⁴⁶ This entailed an awareness of the ‘*sin of oppression*’ and a taking up ‘of the cause of the poor and a condemnation of the cause of the rich’.¹⁴⁷ Nolan presented a God who took definite sides, *with* the oppressed. In articulating the ‘option for the poor’, Nolan was one voice in a global ferment in Christianity. The new emphasis signalled an historic shift, the significance of which he considered to be matched only by Martin Luther’s call of ‘salvation by faith alone’, and in Nolan’s judgement surpassed it even.¹⁴⁸

Nolan’s embrace of the ‘option for the poor’ and the NCFS’s enthusiastic espousal of a theology of liberation have been read alongside the exclusivist claims of Black Theologians associated with the Black Theology project of the UCM, and the rejection by Black Consciousness activists of white liberals as meaningful political actors in South Africa in the 1970s. Whereas Black Theology implicitly was out of bounds to white theologians, liberation theology provided a language with which to continue a dialogue with the Church and State.¹⁴⁹ But the ferment in the NCFS and ASF also provided a theological language that was congruent with Black Consciousness and Black Theology claims for self-determination.

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¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴⁵ Egan, ‘Catholic intellectuals,’ 340.

¹⁴⁶ A. Nolan, ‘The option for the poor in South Africa,’ in Villa-Vicencio and de Gruchy, *Resistance and Hope*, 190-1. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 190. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁴⁹ S. Rakoczy, *Regional Report: South Africa*, Catholic Theology worldwide: regional reports (30 January 2004). Found at: <http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/INSeCT/wide/southafrica-rakoczy.html> (accessed on 29 July 2009).

¹⁵⁰ Egan shows how the NCFS followed a similar organisational trajectory to NUSAS. Like NUSAS, NCFS leaders were often in danger of alienating its student constituency as their thinking pushed far ahead of students. Such radicalism, Egan argues, was responsible for a conservative swing away from politics by the NCFS at the end of the 1970s. The NCFS leaders had gone ‘too far, too quickly’ and had ‘succeeded in alienating considerable sections of their constituency’. Egan, ‘The politics of a South African Catholic student movement,’ 78.

Conclusions

The breakaway of black students from the NUSAS conference in Grahamstown in 1968 coincided with the release of *The Message to the People of South Africa* in the same year by the CI and SACC. This indicated firstly that the legacy of Cottesloe and the external pressure of the WSCF and WCC had slowly gathered momentum during the course of the 1960s, so that by the end of the decade churchmen had formulated a coherent theological challenge to apartheid and separate development. *The Message* was more than a theological statement; it had political implications and served as the basis for challenging the moral authority of apartheid. It was left to the following years for the Christian Institute to develop this alternative more fully.

The ecumenical movement, furthermore, was most vital and closest to black South Africans at the level of students. Before the UCM had been formed, the denominational societies the ASF and NCFS maintained a presence on black campuses, which created contacts that would prove facilitative in the following years. Indeed, the caucus of black students that pulled out of NUSAS initially formed in UCM. As Black Consciousness matured into a thorough critique of liberalism and the assumption, in Biko's words, that 'white leadership is a *sine qua non* in this country',¹⁵¹ young black activists came to share a tenuous but broadly sympathetic position with the ecumenical vision. Their relationship was still fraught and SASO's rhetoric dismissed the UCM's multiracialism and lack of political direction in the early 1970s, but the Christian radicalism of the 1960s survived the demise of the UCM, largely protected as denominational societies, and developed a distinctive critique of apartheid that drew on the liberation theology of South America and developed a local expression through the work of Albert Nolan. The wider legacy of ecumenical endeavour, as later chapters argue, was its emphasis on unity and muting of strict orthodoxy, an approach that was to provide a model for secular oppositional activism in the 1970s.

¹⁵¹ Biko, 'Black Souls in White Skins?', in *I Write*, 26.

The Youth Movement and Social Change: South Africa's 1960s

'No race possesses the monopoly of beauty, intelligence, force, and there is room for all of us at the rendezvous of victory.' I do not think Aimé Césaire was thinking about South Africa when he said these words. The Whites in this country have placed themselves on a path of no return. So blatantly exploitative in terms of mind and body is the practice of White racism that one wonders if the interests of Blacks and Whites in this country have not become so mutually exclusive as to exclude the possibility of there being 'room for all of us at the rendezvous of victory'.

– Steve Biko, 'White Racism and Black Consciousness,' paper presented to the Abe Bailey Institute, Cape Town, January 1971.¹

In the years that the ecumenical movement in South Africa began to take a stand on apartheid the political and socioeconomic context also changed. South Africa experienced an economic boom and marked population growth in the 1960s. Bantu Education extended a basic education to young black South Africans.² After the state banned the ANC and PAC in 1960 both organisations were forced underground.³ Some liberals, the ANC and PAC turned to violence, a choice that arguably played into the hands of the state and had deleterious consequences for resistance to apartheid.⁴ Black South Africans were left without political leaders in the 1960s as they either escaped South Africa for exile or were imprisoned on Robben Island. The National Committee for Liberation, later renamed the African Resistance Movement in 1964, was formed by a group of liberal turned radical 'mavericks'

¹ H. van der Merwe, D. Welsh (eds.), *Student Perspectives on South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1972), 190.

² C. Bundy, 'Street Sociology and Pavement Politics: Aspects of Youth and Student Resistance in Cape Town, 1985,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13, 3 (Apr 1987), 303-30. Bundy draws on the work of Karl Mannheim to assert the significance of 'the demographic factor' and generational identity for the politicisation of African youth. Bundy notes that between 1960 and 1975 there was a sevenfold increase in school-goers, which gave rise to the phenomenon of youth unemployment and reached an acute point by the 1980s (312). See also S. Johnson, "'The Soldiers of Luthuli': Youth in the Politics of Resistance in South Africa' in S. Johnson (ed.), *South Africa: No Turning Back* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 94-154.

³ For a recent study see R. Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa, 1950-1976* (Boulder, CO: First Forum Press, 2009).

⁴ For a significant new overview of the 1960s and these events see the South African Democracy Education Trust (ed.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1, 1960 – 1970* (Cape Town, Zebra Press, 2004), in particular Chapter Two, 'The turn to armed struggle,' 53 – 145. For a new account of the ANC in exile see Arianna Lissoni's study, 'The South African liberation movements in exile, c.1950-1970,' (Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 2007). See also A. Lissoni, 'Transformations in the ANC External Mission and Umkhonto we Sizwe, c. 1960-1969,' *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35, 2, Special Issue: Liberation Struggles, Exile and International Solidarity (June 2009), 287-301.

and ‘heretics,’ who had been arrested in the government’s clampdown after Sharpeville.⁵ A short campaign followed where installations were bombed, but the group was quickly netted by the police. White liberals in Paton’s Liberal Party and the student union NUSAS continued as best they could through the 1960s after a traumatic public trial and harsh prison sentences for the accused.⁶

In 1968 the apartheid state followed its clampdown of the early 1960s and outlawed multiracial political parties under the Prohibition of Improper Interference Act. Alan Paton’s Liberal Party chose to disband in protest, rather than continue as an exclusively white party.⁷ The end of the Liberal Party signalled a low point for South African liberals and enhanced a feeling of political impasse, which had steadily built through the 1960s. The situation was compounded by the state’s efforts to tarnish the image of the leading liberal research institute, the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), and represent it as out of touch with political currents within the country.⁸ The apogee of international student radicalism, with the 1968 student-led revolts in France and Germany, coincided with the nadir of South African liberalism, and provided NUSAS and radicals in its ranks the opportunity to take the initiative to engage in new forms of political activism.⁹ It was only with the decade’s close that ideas that had stimulated international activism began to gain real purchase.¹⁰

Following from the first chapter, this chapter argues that religious groups provided support and institutional protection for liberal students from increasing state repression. In the Western Cape the Dominican priory of St Nicholas’s at Stellenbosch provided an institutional space for nurturing radicalism and together with the group of the so-called

⁵ M. Gunther, ‘The National Committee of Liberation (NCL)/ African Resistance Movement (ARM),’ in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa Vol. 1*, 209-255.

⁶ For the harrowing prison memoir of an ARM member see Hugh Lewin’s *Bandiet: Seven Years in a South African Prison* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1974). Republished in 2002 as *Bandiet: Out of Jail* (Johannesburg: Random House, 2002).

⁷ M. Legassick and C. Saunders, ‘Aboveground activity in the 1960s,’ in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa. Volume 1, 1960 – 1970*, 669.

⁸ P. Rich, *Hope and Despair: English Speaking Intellectuals and South African Politics 1896 – 1976* (London and New York: British Academic Press, 1993), 99.

⁹ Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth have called for recognition of a ‘long 1960s’ which they define as the period stretching from 1956 to 1977. They argue that ‘1968’ functions as a metaphor that captures a trajectory of transnational European protest and activism which encompasses such events as the 1956 Hungarian revolt, and extends to the climax of political ferment and terrorist activity in Germany and Italy in 1977. M. Klimke, J. Scharloth (eds.), *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956 - 1977* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹⁰ H. Lunn, “‘Hippies, radicals and the Sounds of Silence.’ Cultural Dialectics at two South African Universities, 1966 – 1976,’ (Ph.D. thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2009), 20.

sextigers ("Sixtiers"), dissident left-leaning Afrikaans intellectuals clustered around writer and intellectual André Brink, the friars and Christian student groups facilitated the creation of a radical space in the heartland of Afrikaner nationalism.

After mapping out this institutional context, the chapter considers the complex relationship between liberal students and the growing organisation, SASO. The interplay between Black Consciousness leaders and New Left student activists was the significant and distinguishing feature of this moment in student national politics in South Africa in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. As apartheid looked vigilantly for potential sources of insurrection, liberal students were increasingly seen by the state as a 'cancer' in the country.¹¹ The government-appointed Commission of Inquiry into Certain Organisations (Schlebusch Commission) indicated that the state viewed students and radical Christians as a potentially serious internal threat. The formation of SASO, in contrast, was initially not deemed a danger by the state, as it viewed the organisation's black-only policy as a victory of apartheid thinking. This began to change when Turfloop student leader Abraham Tiro initiated countrywide strikes at the black universities in 1972, and was firmly dispelled when SASO and BPC arranged two rallies to celebrate the victory of Frelimo and the independence of Mozambique from Portuguese rule, by which stage the state viewed Black Consciousness as a 'serious and potentially revolutionary' challenge to its control.¹²

The Abe Bailey Conference

The launch of SASO in July 1969 at the University of the North was a coming of age for black students. SASO's birth marked a new stage in black political self-awareness and was a starting point from which black students began to reach out and communicate with one another. Although SASO did not initially offer an overt challenge to the liberal and white-dominated NUSAS, as it accepted the 'principle that in any one country at any time a national union must be open to all students in that country,'¹³ the motive for SASO was eloquently explained by Biko. 'What SASO objects to is the dichotomy between principle and practice so apparent among members of that organisation [NUSAS]. While very few would like to

¹¹ The apartheid government resisted the introduction of television to the country, in the belief that it would undermine social control. The government only introduced the technology in 1976. Lunn, *cit.*, 5.

¹² Lobban, *White Man's Justice*, 23.

¹³ Biko, *I Write*, 5.

criticise NUSAS policy and principles as they appear on paper one tends to get worried at all the hypocrisy practised by members of that organisation'.¹⁴

In January 1971, just over a year and a half after SASO's official launch at the University of the North, students from the wide ideological spectrum of student organisations in South Africa including NUSAS leaders, and Biko and Pityana of SASO, were invited under the auspices of the Abe Bailey Institute at the University of Cape Town, to meet together to present and discuss papers on student politics in South Africa. The conference drew representatives from the normally aloof Afrikaanse Studentebond (ASB). As Biko later remembered in his first conversation with *Daily Dispatch* editor Donald Woods, his paper which opened with the Césaire quip was 'overkill, actually',¹⁵ but it amply exemplified the mood of black students and made for difficult listening for the other, predominantly white, conference delegates.

The conference was a space in which the tensions in South African student politics crystallised and in which new relationships were created across a broader terrain.¹⁶ SASO activist and student at Durban Medical School, Mamphela Ramphele, remembers that Biko's paper to the Abe Bailey Conference provided him opportunity to formalise his ideas.¹⁷ Lindy Wilson quotes Pityana as saying that the papers were 'a major refinement of what we were doing' and were a synthesis of the conversations Biko and Pityana had during the course of 1970. According to Pityana, 'there was a lot there between us that was actually a result of conversations and writing and sharing and thinking through precisely how you present in a hostile, in an ambiguous and uncertain climate, something positive and, in our view, certain. We felt certain of the capacity of black people to participate in their own struggle but that needed to be said in a challenging and in a critical way'.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ D. Woods, *Biko* (London: Paddington Press, 1978), 54. According to Woods, Biko later conceded to him that the paper had been written in the 'heat of his early twenties' and that Biko claimed not to 'reject liberalism as such or white liberals as such. I reject only the concept that black liberation can be achieved through the leadership of white liberals'. *Ibid.*

¹⁶ My thanks to Alan Lester for this formulation of the implications of the Abe Bailey conference.

¹⁷ Ramphele dates the Abe Bailey conference to the 1969 December holidays and then goes on to emphasise the importance of 1970 for the maturation of Black Consciousness: 'The year 1970 marked the real turning point in the maturation of the Black Consciousness Movement. Steve Biko and Barney Pityana were participants in a seminar of student leaders of all colours and political persuasions, held at the Abe Bailey Institute (now the Centre for Conflict Resolution) at the University of Cape Town during the 1969 December holidays. In the preparation for their presentation a lot of their own thoughts were clarified, and their papers reflected a growing sense of confidence in the importance of their mission as student leaders and the role they were to play as liberators of their own people.' M. Ramphele, *Across Boundaries: The Journey of a South African Woman Leader* (New York: The Feminist Press, 1996), 59.

¹⁸ Wilson, 'Biko: A Life,' in Pityana et al., *Bounds of Possibility*, 26-7.

The rhetorical attack that SASO launched was delivered effectively at the Abe Bailey Institute conference; in Pityana's words their message needed to be 'said in a challenging and critical way'. Why did Biko and Pityana attend the meeting? As a liberal conference, premised on the need to encourage and develop dialogue among student leaders, it was antithetical to the direction in which SASO was moving. Pityana's comments indicate that Black Consciousness was constituted in *contradistinction* with its interlocutors rather than in isolation and that the dialogue was facilitated by a shared space.

But the implied student solidarity of the conference was problematic for SASO policy. The papers were collected and published with a preface by the Harvard sociologist Seymour Martin Lipset, who dramatically judged the papers to outweigh the significance of the rapidly growing literature published in the wake of the May 1968 protests in France, as well as the activities of American student movements in the 1960s.¹⁹ Saths Cooper, the secretary of the Black Consciousness -affiliated and student-run Theatre Council of Natal (TECON) disagreed, and he dismissed Lipset's claim and most of the contributions bar Pityana's and Biko's, in a scathing review in *SASO Newsletter* for its bias towards white South African attitudes and outlooks.²⁰ SASO and Black Consciousness needed to be distanced from student solidarity, to assert the unique need for *black* solidarity.

Tertiary Education and Political Struggle

The concerns of the students tabled at the Abe Bailey conference were indelibly shaped by government education policies set out in the 1950s.²¹ After this decade, the first graduates of the state's Bantu Education tertiary system were forced to orient themselves as black South Africans in a nominally 'white' South Africa. While deeply racist and designed to inculcate a mentality of perpetual servitude, Bantu Education extended a basic education to a greater proportion of the African population than had been possible under the failing mission-based schools of the Anglican, Methodist and Catholic churches. The short-term goal of the state's new education scheme was thus to replace the mission-based control of African education and to reassert the government's hegemony over its black subjects, and to

¹⁹ S. Lipset, 'Preface,' in Van der Merwe and Welsh, *Student Perspectives on South Africa*, 1 – 7.

²⁰ *SASO Newsletter* 2, 2 (March/April 1972), 12.

²¹ For an authoritative overview see P. Kallaway (ed.), *The History of Education under Apartheid, 1994 - 1994: The Doors of Learning and Culture Shall Be Opened* (Cape Town: Longman, 2002).

achieve the acquiescence of the black working class.²² The policy further sought to defuse the political opposition that had coalesced during the Second World War and to establish ideological control after the mass urbanisation caused by the boom in secondary industry during the Second World War and the intensification of rural poverty.²³ As well as a counter to South Africa's radical welfare reforms of the 1940s,²⁴ the new education policy aimed to constrain the 'potentially explosive needs of urban youth' and the aspirations of their parents for a better future for their children.²⁵

Bantu Education also owed its genesis to older debates dating from the segregationist moment of the 1920s and 1930s.²⁶ The education policy was conceived in relation to the so-called 'native question,' about how to address the demographic majority of Africans in the Union.²⁷ The policy of Bantu Education was furthermore central to the ideology of apartheid itself; Dr W.W.M. Eiselen, the 'Stellenbosch anthropologist-turned-native administrator'²⁸ and son of a Berlin Society missionary,²⁹ who was its key ideologue and principal author of the *Eiselen Report* (1951).³⁰ Cynthia Kros argues that the significance of the *Eiselen Report* was its systematic articulation of the ideology of apartheid at a time when the Nationalist government was still finding its feet in government, and for the report's vision of a new social order that would be achieved through massive state intervention.³¹ Bantu Education

²² J. Hyslop, "'A destruction coming in': Bantu Education as Response to Social Crisis,' in P. Bonner, Delius and D. Posel (eds.), *Apartheid's Genesis: 1936 - 1965* (Braamfontein: Ravan Press; Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1993), 405

²³ For more on these changes and the response of the apartheid government, see Delius and Posel, *Apartheid's Genesis*. Hyslop's argument makes revealing comparison with Robert Fatton's (1986) assertion that Black Consciousness aimed to wrest hegemony from the white state. The comparison highlights the failure of Verwoerd to reassert white hegemony over black education, as well as the significance of black education for the struggle against apartheid.

²⁴ S. Dubow, A. Jeeves (eds.), *South Africa's 1940s: Worlds of Possibilities* (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2005).

²⁵ Hyslop, 'Bantu Education as Response to Social Crisis,' 395.

²⁶ See S. Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid, 1919-36* (London: Macmillan Press, 1989).

²⁷ C. Kros, 'Economic, Political and Intellectual Origins of Bantu Education 1926 – 1951,' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Witwatersrand, 1996), 29. Adam Ashforth describes the 'Native Question' as 'the intellectual domain in which the knowledge, strategies, policies, and justifications necessary to the maintenance of domination were fashioned'. A. Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1.

²⁸ Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge*, 232.

²⁹ Thomas, *Christ Divided*, 57.

³⁰ Kros, 'Origins of Bantu Education,' 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 30-1.

was central to the Nationalist attempt both to provide ideological legitimization for apartheid, but was also ‘the expression of a plan to reconstitute the state’.³²

In practice Bantu Education was a ‘travesty’, as the state failed to invest the resources Eiselen recommended.³³ But the extension of a basic education contributed to rising levels of literacy among Africans during the 1950s and 1960s, which facilitated the growth of a ‘nascent intellectual elite attuned to the ideas and norms of the wider world’.³⁴ A substantial newspaper readership developed who engaged with international political developments, in particular the quickened pace of decolonisation in Africa.³⁵ Youth radicalism and Black Consciousness developed in the context of this burgeoning African petit bourgeoisie.³⁶ By the beginning of the 1970s a generation of Black students had come of age. These students were trained for future leadership of the new proto-states of the ‘homelands’. The unintended consequence of Bantu Education was that it radicalised black students by attempting to offer a paired down tertiary education with limited political horizons.

The Extension of University Education Act of 1959 set up five university colleges: the University College of Western Cape for ‘Coloureds’; the University College of Durban-Westville for ‘Indians’; the University College of Zululand for ‘Zulus’; the University College of the North for ‘Sotho,’ ‘Tsonga,’ ‘Tswana’ and ‘Venda,’ and the University College of Fort Hare for ‘Xhosas’.³⁷ The act thus brought apartheid to bear on the universities. In 1969 the five university colleges were each granted university status, by five separate legislative enactments.³⁸ The 1959 legislation also effectively challenged the English-speaking universities’ tradition of non-racialism and as a result provoked determined protest from NUSAS, who mobilised students to defend academic freedom and university autonomy. The English-speaking universities were heirs to the British liberal tradition and asserted these core twin rights as fundamental to the integrity of a university. The Afrikaans-speaking institutions

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁴ Karis and Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence*, 13.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa*, 324 – 325. Craig Charney develops the point further arguing that due to South Africa’s ‘clientelist’ state, which operated through an assortment of middlemen, ‘at the local level the South African state was to a considerable extent colonized by a strong black civil society, a relationship that let it function and enjoy some legitimacy.’ C. Charney, ‘Civil Society Vs. The State: Identity, Institutions and the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa,’ (Ph.D. Thesis. Yale University, 2000), 57.

³⁷ G.M. Nkondo (ed.), *Turfloop Testimony: The Dilemma of a Black University in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1976), 2.

³⁸ D. Welsh, ‘Some Political and Social Determinants of the Academic Environment,’ in Van der Merwe and Welsh, *Student Perspectives on South Africa*, 33.

were cast in a different mould and viewed the university's function to be in service to the nation's interests in accordance with the ideology of Christian-nationalism.³⁹ The alignment of Afrikaans universities with state interests signalled the politicization, institutionalization, and nationalisation of knowledge⁴⁰ and fostered the 'development of separate or parallel intellectual fields' between Afrikaans and English-speaking campuses that meant that by the 1970s 'the social sciences were thoroughly bifurcated'.⁴¹

The Mafeje Affair and the 1968 Sit-Ins

The government's intervention into university affairs at the University of Cape Town in 1968 precipitated a chain of events of particular consequence for South African student politics. On 1 May 1968, after considering three applicants, the UCT Council had offered the post of senior lecturer in the Social Anthropology Department to an African academic, Archie Mafeje, who was completing his DPhil at Cambridge. Mafeje had the strong backing of mentor Professor Monica Wilson, who argued that he was the 'ablest anthropologist' of the three candidates and was 'much the best teacher'.⁴² The university registrar wrote Mafeje a letter to inform him of his successful application, but the letter was not sent. On news of the UCT decision Principal Richard Luyt received a letter from the Minister of Education, Jan de Klerk,⁴³ which threatened the government 'would not hesitate to take such steps as it may deem fit to ensure that the accepted traditional outlook of South Africa was observed' were the university to employ Mafeje.⁴⁴ Although the University Council released a statement to protest the government's interference in university affairs and the Dean of Arts, Prof M.W.M. Pope, resigned in protest, the Council gave in and rescinded Mafeje's appointment.⁴⁵

NUSAS protested the UCT Council decision at its mid-year congress at the University of the Witwatersrand in June. The NUSAS delegates passed resolutions that

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁰ Dubow, *A Commonwealth of Knowledge*, 266.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Cited in L. Ntsebeza, 'The Mafeje and UCT saga: unfinished business?', 2. Paper presented to the History and African Studies Seminar, 13 May 2009, Howard College, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, 13 May 2009. Found at: Available at <http://www.history.ukzn.ac.za/node/1031> (accessed 22 October 2010).

⁴³ M. Plaut, 'South African Student Protest, 1968: Remembering the Mafeje Sit-in,' *History Workshop Journal*, 69 (2010), 200.

⁴⁴ Cited in Ntsebeza, *Ibid.*, 3. See also M. Horrell, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa: 1968* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1969), 263.

⁴⁵ Horrell, *Ibid.*

condemned the council's 'betrayal of the university's principles of academic freedom and autonomy' and urged the UCT Student Representative Council to 'do the utmost in its power to organise effective and significant protest'. NUSAS called on students at universities and training colleges to support the protests fully.⁴⁶ When UCT students returned from the July vacation, the SRC and university administration called for a mass-meeting to be held at Jameson Hall to discuss the rescinding of Mafeje's appointment. At the meeting the leader of the Radical Students Society, Raphael Kaplinsky, made an 'impromptu speech' that condemned the meeting as 'a salve to conscience and a ritual' and judged the Council to be guilty of 'doing the government's dirty work for them'.⁴⁷ Inspired by the 1968 international student protests, the UCT students demanded more radical steps be taken to counter the encroachment on academic freedom. Kaplinsky called for another mass meeting a week later, which would lead to a sit-in if the Council failed to reinstate Mafeje. On 14 August students assembled on the step of Jameson Hall and went on to occupy the administration block.

The sit-in was a transformative event for the participants. This was particularly true for Richard Turner for whom the event was 'pivotal' as it was at the sit-in that he began 'to be defined as a student leader'.⁴⁸ Together with Kaplinsky, Turner provided the intellectual leadership for the sit-in. The occupation lasted nine days during which a core group of between 150 and 200 students slept and ate in the UCT administrative block.⁴⁹ Members of staff from UCT gave seminars and lectures. Ken Hughes, one of the student participants in the sit-in, presents the origin of the UCT Sit-in as an outgrowth of the democratic culture at the university. The encroachment of apartheid on academic freedom, he argues, was the chief mobilising factor.⁵⁰ Jeremy Cronin was a law student at UCT, who was later to become a member of the South African Communist Party, describes being 'seduced intellectually' at the alternative university lectures of the sit-in and remarks that the 'key seducer' was Turner.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Cited in Ntsebeza, *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁷ Cited in R. Erbmann, 'Conservative Revolutionaries: Anti-Apartheid Activism at the University of Cape Town 1963-1973,' (B.A. Thesis, Oxford University, 2005), chapter 2. Found at: http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/libraryresources/articles_papers/1963_1973_conservative_revolutionaries.htm (Accessed 23 April 2009).

⁴⁸ Barbara Follett, interview in J. Turner, 'My Father, Rick Turner,' Documentary film. Found at: http://www.barbara-follett.org.uk/richard_turner/index.html (accessed on 12 October 2010).

⁴⁹ Horrell, *Suney: 1968*, 266

⁵⁰ In contrast, Hughes notes that the Warwick and MIT sit-ins in which he was subsequently involved, were mobilised around comparatively 'frivolous' issues, the Vietnam war being an exception. K. Hughes, 'Lessons of the great UCT Sit-in of 1968'. Unpublished manuscript. My thanks to Raphael Kaplinsky for providing me with a copy.

⁵¹ Jeremy Cronin, interview in J. Turner, 'My Father, Rick Turner'.

Meanwhile at Fort Hare, in September of the same year, student unrest also mounted. After a new rector, Prof J.M. de Wet, was appointed, slogans 'of a political nature' were found painted on the library and college hall.⁵² Seventeen students were summoned by the rector and accused of being responsible for the vandalism. They protested innocence but were charged by the Special Branch and had their rooms searched. The student body took exception to the students' treatment, and the additional dissatisfaction that the UCM was barred from the campus.⁵³ Students staged a sit-in directly in front of the administration building. With the rector absent in Pretoria and the intervention of the September break, the students dispersed. They then resumed their sit-in when they returned after the vacation. The following day the rector called in the police to disperse the students, after they had ignored his demand to return to lectures and to send a deputation to meet him. The students were surrounded, had their names taken, and were ordered to collect their belongings and leave the college. In total 290 students left the college.⁵⁴

Although not directly connected with each other, the two sit-ins at UCT and Fort Hare implied a potential common generational cause. Some evidence suggests that there was talk of UCT sit-in students supporting the Fort Hare students for further planned protests, and that attempts to do so were thwarted by police blockades.⁵⁵ Although this account needs corroboration, it implies a potential student solidarity, which SASO in time chose to distance itself from.

Students and Friars at Stellenbosch

St. Nicholas's priory was founded by the Dominican Order of the Catholic Church. Under the leadership and inspiration of Augustine Shutte and Oswin Magrath, a Dominican priest based in Stellenbosch from 1937 to 1956, Stellenbosch was to become a surprising source of progressive politics.⁵⁶ Part of the significance of St Nicholas' Priory was as a centre of intellectual activity. The Dominican 'house of studies' was established in Stellenbosch in

⁵² Horrell, *Survey*: 1968, 266

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 266-8.

⁵⁵ Plaut, 'South African Student Protest, 1968,' 203.

⁵⁶ Information on Oswin Magrath is drawn from P. Denis, 'Magrath, Oswin, 1908 to 1998'. Found at: http://www.dacb.org/stories/southafrica/magrath_oswin.html (accessed on 06 January 2010). Magrath was transferred in 1956 to become rector of the Catholic seminary for black priests, St. Peter's Hammanskraal, north of Pretoria, of particular importance in the later development of Black Theology.

1943. The need for the new priory was caused by the application of three young men to the Order, whom the Dominicans were loath to lose, as well as by the Second World War that had created a 'shortage of vocations'.⁵⁷ The house was furthermore bilingual (English and Afrikaans). Oswin Magrath and Bonaventure Perquin served as lecturers and a philosophy course was introduced, as 'an act of faith in the future'.⁵⁸ The next two decades saw the consolidation of St Nicholas's and 'local academics and clergy from all denominations would often drop in to see the friars'.⁵⁹ In the 1960s the priory was closely involved in the *gespreksgroepe* ('discussion groups') organised by the Stellenbosch philosopher Professor Johan Degenaar, and the friars Ninian McManus, Timothy McDermott and Albert Nolan were invited to represent the discipline of theology along with some local Protestant clergy at the group.⁶⁰ The political awareness of the friars was stimulated by their involvement in the NCFS, UCM as well as another group, Intersem.⁶¹ The priory's new vicar general, Hans Brenninkmeijer, embraced the *aggiornamento* initiated by the Second Vatican Council and his appointment led to liturgical 'experiments' similar to what the UCM pioneered at Rhodes University.

On the return of Turner and his wife, Barbara, to South Africa in 1966 the couple took over the running of his mother's farm, Welcarnes, outside Stellenbosch. This move brought Turner into the orbit of Stellenbosch intellectual life, and he lectured at the university part-time whilst running the farm. Barbara remembers the importance of this period as an 'exciting time' for Turner, who came into contact with André Brink and Fredrick Van Zyl Slabbert. Turner did 'a lot of talking with people on the Afrikaner left, the *verligtes*'.⁶² These discussions shaped Turner and it was later a distinguishing feature that he was never disparaging of the potential radicalism of the Afrikaner left.⁶³

As a student leader of the Radical Students Society, Raphael Kaplinsky was a Marxist, who faithfully 'held no truck with the church'.⁶⁴ Although Turner shared his atheism it was to Kaplinsky's great surprise that Turner approached him in Cape Town to visit St Nicholas's

⁵⁷ Denis, *The Dominican Friars in Southern Africa*, 128.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 137.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁶² Barbara Follett, interview in J. Turner, 'My Father, Rick Turner'.

⁶³ Gij's Dubbeld, interview with author, Durban, 09 August 2008.

⁶⁴ R. Kaplinsky, interview with author, Brighton, 11 August 2009.

priory adjoining the University of Stellenbosch to meet the friars. Kaplinsky recalls being surprised at the progressive nature of the friars at Stellenbosch, 'both personally and politically'. Later again, Turner approached Kaplinsky to join him to go and speak to the Afrikaans students at Stellenbosch. It aroused considerable anxiety in him as Stellenbosch students had attacked the participants of the 1968 UCT Sit-in. As Kaplinsky recalls: '[Rick] came and said "you know there's these Stellenbosch students who are very progressive, won't you come and speak?" And I thought "you're joking, they're going to kill me" – they had tried to kill us at the sit-in. And Rick said, "no, no, these are *verligtes*, but they're really very progressive".' Kaplinsky was persuaded to go to Stellenbosch and remembers being 'just dumbstruck at the progressive radicalism of these Afrikaners in Stellenbosch'.⁶⁵

In Kaplinsky's estimation, it was the Dominicans, especially under the intellectual leadership of Augustine Shutte, a lecturer in political philosophy at UCT, who were the driving force for the progressive radicalism at Stellenbosch and they formed 'a cadre of intellectual dynamism' that benefitted from the relative protection offered by the Catholic Church.⁶⁶ It was in this role, as a 'philosophical catalyst' protected in part by the Church, that the group gave new intellectual energy and direction to the development of progressive radicalism among liberal students in the Western Cape.⁶⁷

The Catholic Church played a wider role in the re-emergence of Black trade unions, specifically through their Urban Training Project (UTP), designed to provide education for workers.⁶⁸ The UTP was supported by the Young Christian Workers (YCW), an internationally aligned organisation that promoted democratic participation in trade unions, through 'a profoundly progressive and innovative methodology that was easy for workers to assimilate and relate to their lived experiences under capitalism and apartheid'.⁶⁹ The YCW founder, Belgian Revd Joseph Cardijn, advocated a worker-centred organisation to promote

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Barbara Follet, email communication with author, 8 February 2010. Although outside of this chapter's scope, the University of the Western Cape also responded to Black Consciousness, when Pityana visited the campus in 1971. There was equally a tense interplay with the history of the Non-European Unity Movement, the Association of Young Africa and the BCM. See C.C. Thomas, 'Disaffection, Identity, Black Consciousness and a New Rector: An Exploratory Take on Student Activism at the University of the Western Cape, 1966-1976,' *South African Historical Journal*, 54 (2005), 72 – 90; and also E. Messina, 'Swartbewustheid in Die Wes-Kaap 1970-1984,' (Ph.D. thesis, University of the Western Cape, 1995).

⁶⁸ Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, 40-1.

⁶⁹ S. Buhlungu, 'Rebels without a Cause of Their Own?: The Contradictory Location of White Officials in Black Unions in South Africa, 1973-94,' *Current Sociology*, 54, 3 (2006), 445; J. Sithole and S. Ndlovu, 'The Revival of the Labour Movement, 1970 – 1980,' in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2. 1970 – 1980*, 188.

worker leadership. The approach placed value on the individual workers' experience, drawing on the 'see, judge, act' approach, that involved workers reflecting on their experience.⁷⁰ Together with the ex-Trade Union Council of South Africa (TUCSA) unionists Eric Tyacke and Loet Douwes-Dekker, the YCW launched the Urban Training Project in 1971, which together with the work of Harriet Bolton in Durban,⁷¹ and the activities of NUSAS' Wages Commissions were early steps towards reorganising black trade unions.

The Catholic milieu in the Cape also boasted Martin Versfeld, an Afrikaans Catholic philosopher who lectured at UCT during the 1950s. As a Catholic intellectual Versfeld was an apologist for the faith through Catholic newspaper *The Southern Cross* and Catholic Afrikaans newspaper *Die Brug* ('the Bridge'). In 1954 he published *The Perennial Order*, a book that sought to defend Christian revelation against 'neutral agnosticism' which, he alleged, disguised a 'dangerous dogma of nihilism'.⁷² Versfeld had to defend Catholicism, Reformed Christianity's traditional *Roomse Gevaar* ('Roman Peril'), against its accusers, which he did by emphasising the Catholic Church's role as a bulwark against communism.⁷³

Versfeld was an intellectual influence on the young Turner, who was his student at UCT in the early 1960s, as well as on Afrikaans poet Breyten Breytenbach, Turner's senior by a few years. Nash detects Versfeld's ideas in Turner's projection of a future South African society in *The Eye of the Needle* (1972), where his formulation of a Christian ethical system bore close resemblance to Versfeld's own approach, specifically his argument that Marxism offered 'a secularized version of a Christian philosophy of history', whereby sinful/alienated man was to be restored to Biblical/utopian community.⁷⁴ Versfeld critiqued Marxism as an 'ersatz theology, vulnerable to the critique of Christianity,' as it was an ideology that 'usurps its prerogative' by substituting the knowledge of God for self-knowledge. Thus a 'genuine Christian confrontation with Marxism' was one which pointed out that Marxism was not radical enough as it 'has a vested interest in much of what it attacks', and represents not so much an overthrow of the bourgeois world as a development of it 'to its limits'.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ D. Lowry, *20 Years in the Labour Movement: The Urban Training Project and Change in South Africa, 1971–1991*, (Johannesburg: Wadmore, 1999), cited in Buhlungu, 'Rebels without a Cause of their Own?', 445.

⁷¹ For a new study of Bolton, her role in TUCSA and the formation of the Wages Commission in Durban see H. Keal, "'A life's work': Harriet Bolton and Durban's trade unions, 1944 – 1974," (M.A. Thesis., University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2009).

⁷² Egan, 'Catholic Intellectuals,' 325.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 326.

⁷⁴ Nash, 'The Dialectical Tradition in South Africa,' 209 – 210.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 211.

NUSAS and SASO: Uncomfortable Bedfellows?

From its formation in the 1930s, NUSAS attempted to emphasise the importance of ‘contact’ between students, placated Afrikaner concerns, and sought to accommodate African demands for increased representation.⁷⁶ It was only after the 1948 electoral victory of the National Party, that the ‘the lingering hope of eventual reunification between English and Afrikaner students receded, and the central focus of debate in NUSAS shifted to tension on the English-language campuses between the liberal urge to involve NUSAS in the wider issues of national politics, and the conservative view that the organization should confine itself solely to student matters.’⁷⁷ The historian Martin Legassick has drawn a distinction between a ‘students as such’ versus a ‘students in society’ approach that NUSAS negotiated through its various metamorphoses, where in the former approach the emphasis fell on the student body to primarily represent student concerns, whereas in the latter its role included an element of political leadership, as students were to be seen as a vanguard for democratic values and progressive social change in society.⁷⁸

In a 1969 speech to the student body at the University of Witwatersrand NUSAS president, Duncan Innes, sought to distance NUSAS from its earlier radical turn.⁷⁹ Responding to National Party press and conservative student’s pamphlets gloating about Jonty Driver’s 1964 Botha’s Hill address, given to what was supposed to be a closed meeting, where Driver was alleged to have suggested NUSAS become a front for the national liberation movement, Innes correctly maintained that this was ‘nonsense’.⁸⁰ NUSAS was not and could not be a subversive organisation he argued. It was a national students’ union

⁷⁶ Karis and Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence*, 65 – 66.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 66

⁷⁸ M. Legassick, ‘The National Union of South African Students,’ (Los Angeles, University of California 1967), cited in B. Kline, ‘The National Union of South African Students: a Case-Study of the Plight of Liberalism, 1924-77,’ *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 23, 1 (1985), 139.

⁷⁹ A shortened version of the talk appeared in the *Rand Daily Mail* the following day as ‘This is the Students’ Credo’. *Rand Daily Mail*, 7 May 1969.

⁸⁰ Driver’s Botha’s Hill speech was in fact a carefully worded response to Martin Legassick’s recommendations that NUSAS switch to individual affiliation. Legassick’s restructuring would allow for NUSAS to become a more effective intellectual vanguard, with the possibility of having a black majority. Driver rejected the proposal and argued it would bring about the certain collapse of NUSAS. The Botha’s Hill participants rejected the radical position. Driver was subsequently censured for the ‘recklessness’ of his speech, amply showing the fine line NUSAS was forced to steer between substantive protest and the danger of government proscription. Karis and Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence*, 67 – 68.

mandated to represent students' opinions, and could do no more.⁸¹ Innes's address synthesised the two tendencies described by Legassick. On the one hand, Innes asserted the 'students as such' role of NUSAS as merely representing South African students, and no more. On the other hand, he sought to conserve a 'students in society' role for NUSAS. He bridged this gap with an informed idealism, of which his address *Our Country, Our Responsibility* (1969) was a sustained statement.

Innes's address presented a brief synopsis of the state of education in South Africa, noted the massive imbalance in overall enrolment rates of African students with respect to whites, and provided a short critique to the 'hoax of separate nations,' followed by an exposé of the 'realities of a Bantustan'. His conclusion addressed the role of the student and rejected any possibility of 'subversion'. Instead, Innes ended with an exhortation for students to stand up for their ideals and quoted from Robert Kennedy, who had visited the country in 1966 on the invitation of banned NUSAS president Ian Robertson: 'Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or strikes out against injustice or acts to improve the lot of others, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and these ripples meeting each other form a hundred different centres of energy and daring will build a wave which will be so strong that it can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and hate'.⁸² It was apparently left to the individual student as to how this idealism was to be carried out.

NUSAS had a strong ally in the SAIRR, which would have felt more comfortable with just such an ill-defined political mandate that valued the sanctity of political and moral convictions over radical action. It was a political sentiment more broadly representative of liberals at this time. In a 1967 address to the University of Natal SRC and the Natal region of the SAIRR, René de Villiers, senior assistant editor of *The Star*, similarly asserted the 'vital role' of South African students, which he saw as 'exposing cant, humbug and hypocrisy in every sphere' and to refuse to be 'fobbed off with the second-rate and the shoddy because these might correspond to a mythical South African norm or way of life'.⁸³ Beyers Naudé echoed similar sentiments when he spoke to students at the University of Cape Town on Academic Freedom Day, of the same year. 'Live up to the highest convictions and principles

⁸¹ Published as D. Innes, *Our Country Our Responsibility* (London: The Africa Bureau, 1969), 15.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 19.

⁸³ *Race Relations News*, 29, (1967).

of the spiritual and moral truths of our Western heritage' he told students, 'Stand fast on what you honestly and sincerely regard to be just, to be lovable, to be true'.⁸⁴

While morally admirable, Naudé's and de Villiers' statements represented only an early stage of the process of radicalisation. It was though precisely the 'return to the source' that Naudé advocated, that was central to a philosophical revaluation of the ethical, political and social basis of South African life, fully undertaken from only the end of the decade and leading to the radical position of Naudé and the Christian Institute by 1977.

* * *

The focus of the discussion to follow is to show how white students continued to respond to political developments within South Africa, and how they sought to accommodate SASO as a new political player. With the emergence of Black Consciousness, white liberals were dismissed as being more or less irrelevant to the black struggle. As such it came as a powerful lesson to liberals, who experienced it as 'a painful and bewildering development', the psychological impact of which was in some cases 'devastating'.⁸⁵ The situation was compounded by the pleasure taken by the government and nationalist supporters, whose belief in separate development seemed vindicated. The force of the rhetorical attack of Black Consciousness was calculated to spell the death of liberalism in South Africa. Although SASO had initially adopted the stance of recognising NUSAS as the national union, by its 1970 General Student's Council the SASO executive had withdrawn this recognition, arguing that 'the emancipation of the black peoples in this country depends on the role the black peoples themselves are prepared to play', and noting that 'in the principles and make-up of NUSAS, the black students can never find expression for aspirations foremost in their minds'.⁸⁶

The SASO breakaway, however, helped to resolve an aspect of the 'dilemma' white students had faced. At a seminar in April 1972, seeking to address the black students' split from NUSAS and looking back over the history of the 1960s, NUSAS president for 1972, Paul Pretorius, recognised that the breakaway of SASO was now 'history'. The white student's dilemma was now, not as in the Legassick/Driver era of how best to represent black students, but rather the problem had now shifted to white society itself 'and it is there

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ G. Budlender, 'Black Consciousness and the Liberal Tradition: Then and Now,' in Pityana et al., *Bounds of Possibility*, 228.

⁸⁶ B.A. Khoapa (ed.), *Black Review 1972* (Durban: Black Community Programmes, 1973), 20.

we must seek to resolve it'.⁸⁷ Pretorius argued further that '[o]ur dilemma is an indication that we are in fact oppressed by our whiteness'. Being white was a condition created by extant chance, he argued, and required where possible a rejection of 'privileges foistered [sic] upon us'.⁸⁸ This shift indicated a loosening of the superiority complex identified by Biko and Pityana and also signalled a step towards a diagnosis of the ethical and psychological maladies of apartheid society. Black Consciousness had effectively challenged the liberal idea of custodianship, strongly evident in Innes's approach and title, *Our Country, Our Responsibility*. After Biko and the Black Consciousness challenge, civic responsibility and nationality could no longer be taken for granted, and the ball was firmly in the court of white liberals to prove themselves worthy of African citizenship.⁸⁹

But relationships between the two organisations remained complex and personal relationships persisted after the SASO breakaway. NUSAS president for 1969, Duncan Innes, remembers the importance of his conversations with Biko, meeting him at the significant 1968 Grahamstown NUSAS conference, where black students broke off to discuss the formation of SASO. Innes recalls that he was profoundly challenged by Biko's speech to the assembled NUSAS assembly, in response to the decision of Rhodes University to enforce segregated accommodation on the conference delegates. Biko called for a 24 hour hunger strike in protest, and this was Innes's first personal sacrifice for his anti-apartheid ideals.

The real significance of the conference for Innes was the time Biko took to 'help me understand how black people experienced apartheid,' a lesson he judges, was 'invaluable in helping me to understand black oppression, not only socially and politically, but also psychologically and intellectually'. He describes further learning 'that the struggle against apartheid was one in which there was no middle ground: you were either part of the problem or part of the solution'.⁹⁰ Innes was able to maintain a close personal relationship with Biko. Through Innes's term as NUSAS president in 1969 they kept in close contact, and Innes hosted Biko on several occasions when he visited Cape Town. It was this close relationship between Innes and Biko that allowed the NUSAS and SASO leaderships to maintain some

⁸⁷ P. Pretorius, 'Where to now white student?' paper presented to NUSAS seminar, April 1972, 3. Found at www.aluka.org (accessed 13 March 2008).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁹ For more on this point see S. Dubow, 'South Africa and South Africans: nationality, belonging, citizenship,' in R. Ross, A. Mager and B. Nasson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South Africa, Volume 2, 1885 - 1994* (Cambridge, 2011), In press.

⁹⁰ D. Innes, 'A white man remembers,' in C. van Wyk (ed.), *We Write What We Like: Celebrating Steve Biko* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007), 110.

contact, and Innes argues that when SASO split off from NUSAS ‘the two organisations operated as separate student wings in the common struggle against apartheid’.⁹¹

The changes that NUSAS implemented in 1970 reflected a wider moment of reassessment and revaluation of strategy that the emergence of Black Consciousness engendered. NUSAS president, Neville Curtis, and Deputy President, Paul Pretorius, emphasised in 1971 that at its annual conference the previous year, NUSAS had ‘welcomed the formation of SASO,’ seeing the emergence of Black Consciousness as ‘a source of power inextricably bound up with the struggle for freedom in South Africa’. They further emphasised that Black Consciousness and non-racialism could be maintained together as separate but complimentary political goals, ‘the active practice of non-racialism in this racial society will continue side by side with an emerging black consciousness as they were [sic] towards a common goal’ they stressed.⁹²

Curtis’s and Pretorius’s overview of NUSAS revealed the ferment and hope that 1970 generated. Their joint circular was also a response to the Kumasi Declaration of 1971 by the Commonwealth Students Conference in January, which called for an embargo on arms sales to South Africa, as well as a stop to the exploitation of black workers in the country, and a ban on sporting and cultural ties with the regime. Under Curtis and Pretorius NUSAS sought to respond to the Kumasi declaration and to take on board new ideas. In the *NUSAS Newsletter* of that year Curtis explained that ‘the new ideas which emerged in reassessment are being carried further’. Students were concerned now with ‘the total transformation of society and its values,’ the implications of which ‘were being evaluated in economic, moral, cultural and social as well as political terms’.⁹³ Curtis remarked on the growing importance of the youth as ‘a force for change’ and the influence of ‘a radical awareness’ that had supplanted the older liberal paradigm, which allowed a better sense of society as a whole and racism in ‘all spheres’.

Curtis’s treatment of the radical position significantly was still based on an analysis of racism, rather than of class, which was to become dominant only by the mid 1970s, and suggested that the possibilities Curtis sensed took on a particular Marxist edge only in subsequent years. In March 1971 NUSAS and SASO held a joint executive meeting, where

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁹² Letter from Neville Curtis to Overseas National Unions, 7 June 1971, 2. BC586 (B4.2 1971), Manuscripts and Archives Department, University of Cape Town Libraries. Found at www.aluka.org (accessed 10 September 2009).

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

SASO declared it was 'not expedient' for it to cooperate with a white organisation, or one which included whites. The meeting concluded, however, with SASO agreeing that the organisations would remain in contact 'on an exchange of information basis' and 'with each organisation recognising the role of the other'.⁹⁴

Turfloop, Tiro and the 1972 University Strikes

On 6 May 1969 – a mere two months before the official launch of SASO at the university college – a student meeting of 530 students passed a resolution that expressed their dissatisfaction with the university's refusal of their decision to affiliate to NUSAS. The following day 400 of the students marched on the Rector's office to voice their complaints.⁹⁵ In response to an invitation from the Turfloop students the NUSAS president, Duncan Innes, along with NUSAS Vice-President, Clive Nettleton, and Horst Kleinschmidt, NUSAS's Transvaal Regional Director and later a member of the Spro-cas white conscientisation programme,⁹⁶ attempted to meet with the black students on their campus in the same month. On meeting the Rector, Prof F.G. Engelbrecht, Innes was refused permission to speak to students and on his return the following day, Innes was given five minutes to leave the campus. Failing to do so, Innes and the others were presented with a police order banning them from the 'Bantu Trust areas in Pietersburg'.⁹⁷

The University of the North caused further trouble for the government; it was a place where state repression was pronounced and where the university's administration clashed with a student body that was particularly determined, well-organised and committed to SASO. It became the focus of NUSAS leaders' attempts to engage with the black students, and was set by NUSAS as a particularly obvious example of an intransigent state-controlled university administration. NUSAS had gained some credibility with black students at Turfloop as a result of the ARM episode, the misinformation surrounding Jonty Driver's Botha's Hill speech that suggested NUSAS was moving in a more radical direction, and due

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁵ Letter from D. Innes to various organisations, 14 May 1969. Found at: www.aluka.org (accessed on 13 March 2008).

⁹⁶ See H. Kleinschmidt (ed.), *White Liberation* (Johannesburg: Spro-cas 2, 1972).

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

to a ban on affiliation enforced on the student bodies at Turfloop, Fort Hare, and the University of Zululand that made NUSAS seem more appealing.⁹⁸

In his report on the above incident in a circular to the NUSAS executive, SRC presidents and overseas student unions, Nettleton remarked that '[t]hree NUSAS officials have now been effectively banned from contact with the students and it would appear likely that any further attempt to contact students there will result in action of some sort being taken against any NUSAS officials and the students involved'.⁹⁹ He also reflected that the Turfloop student's march on the rector's office earlier that year had taken 'great courage' and concluded that it was very possible that Turfloop would be the scene of further demonstrations if the authorities failed to respond to students' demands. Nettleton's observations proved well-founded as the university continued to be a source of trouble for the government.

Turfloop was also to be significant for its material support of SASO. In SASO's financially challenging first year of existence, Turfloop contributed 77 per cent of the total affiliation fees and earned special mention in the *SASO Newsletter*.¹⁰⁰ The financial constraints of the first year were mitigated by the access the SASO executive had to cheap office equipment at the University of Natal Non-European Section (later to be renamed 'Black' Section) in Durban.¹⁰¹ In contrast, SASO remained weak in the Eastern Cape, and it was only when permission was granted by the rector to form a SASO branch at the University of Fort Hare, on the condition that the expelled Pityana did not 'set his foot at Fort Hare,' that SASO could hope 'to see a more vigorous SASO' emerge there.¹⁰²

Activism among students at Turfloop was matched by a strong and determined black staff. The Black Academic Staff Association (BASA) formed in 1972 at the University of the North. Partly modelled on SASO itself the organisation called for an 'Africanisation' of education and academic staff at the university. BASA responded to the Snyman Commission's inquiries with the publication of *Turfloop Testimony*, in which they concluded that the significance of the Frelimo victory in Mozambique for the Turfloop students was that it appeared as an 'affirmation, in political terms, of Black Consciousness and the

⁹⁸ Karis and Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence*, 68.

⁹⁹ Letter from C. Nettleton to various organisations, 30 May 1969. Found at www.aluka.org (accessed 13 March 2008).

¹⁰⁰ *SASO Newsletter* (August 1970), 22.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *SASO Newsletter* (September 1970), 4.

confirmation of black identity in the continent of their birth'.¹⁰³ As such, the milieu of focus on black history, black theology, black experience aroused by SASO and Black Consciousness on black campuses, seemed to have had confirmation in the political developments in Africa, of their focus on solidarity and self-sufficiency.

In the same year, Turfloop SRC president Abraham Onkgopotse Tiro initiated a countrywide boycott of the Bush universities. He had been expelled by the university administration following his thunderous and eloquent denunciation of Bantu Education before no-less than the entire university and rector, at the graduation ceremony in April 1972.¹⁰⁴ In his speech, Tiro sought to speak truth to power, and truth for him meant 'practical reality'. Tiro pointed out the inconsistencies of Bantu Education and emphasised its unfair application in a way that failed to 'adhere to the letter and spirit' of the policy. The proper role of black students, called 'by virtue of our age and academic standing' was 'to greater responsibilities in the liberation of our people'. Where nationalism was awakened 'among the intelligentsia it becomes the vanguard in the struggle against alien rule' he reminded the audience. 'If your education is not linked with the entire continent of Africa it is meaningless'.¹⁰⁵

After Tiro was expelled, students at Turfloop walked out in support of him, an action that initiated a countrywide series of protests at the Black universities.¹⁰⁶ In solidarity white students at the University of Witwatersrand marched to St Mary's Cathedral. A pamphlet released by the Wits SRC listed demands as 'food, family life, free education and decent living wages for all South Africans'. The police responded to the Wits student protests with indiscriminate violence, on which a pamphlet published soon afterwards commented: 'Surely all just men must be shocked at this use of violence; but let us not forget that violence happens every day in South Africa'.¹⁰⁷ Students at UCT staged a protest on the steps of St George's Cathedral. The gathering was baton-charged by the police; some students were beaten by police within the cathedral itself. 138 were arrested and prosecuted. They included

¹⁰³ G.M. Nkondo (ed.), *Turfloop Testimony: The Dilemma of a Black University in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1976), 7.

¹⁰⁴ Tiro was later assassinated on 1 February 1974 in Botswana by a parcel bomb.

¹⁰⁵ O.R. Tiro, 'Bantu Education,' in Nkondo, *Turfloop Testimony*, 92-3.

¹⁰⁶ Nkondo, *Turfloop Testimony*, 6.

¹⁰⁷ *Race Relations News*, 34, 6 June 1972, 2.

Theo Kotze, the chairman of the Cape branch of the Christian Institute and Edward King, the Dean of the Cathedral.¹⁰⁸

The so-called St George's Cathedral incident was front page news. But SASO responded with hostility to the march and argued that the protest had stolen the limelight from the protests at the black universities. The white student marches, the editor of *SASO Newsletter* argued, had hastened the end of the black students' struggles at the bush universities. The white struggle had 'no connection' to the black struggle – rather 'each had its own aims; its own goals', and '[t]he white liberal condescension once again proved itself true'.¹⁰⁹ Here SASO leaders sought to clarify the exact limits of student solidarity. The message of Black Consciousness asserted the need to maintain a critical distance from white students and the implied generational unity. The struggle in South Africa was of a unique form and history, undeniably racialised, and not to be confused with the democratic struggles of Western democracies, and *Black Consciousness* sought to preserve the analytical priority of black solidarity.

NUSAS's and SASO's Radicalisation

Whereas NUSAS sought to adjust to the new political climate inspired by Black Consciousness, many white liberals continued to harbour strong fears and reservations. Joyce Harris, a prominent Black Sash activist, reflected on a symposium on Black Consciousness held in late 1972, 'I accept the reasons for Black Consciousness, I understand its merits and advantages, but I am terrified of its implications. It is a juggernaut constantly gaining momentum. How will the brakes be applied when it becomes necessary to do so, as it inevitably must?'¹¹⁰ It was a concern, indeed, that animated white activists and intimated that their dilemma, which Pretorius had identified, was not easily resolved just by a turn to white society. Although the impetus was now with black students, white activists armed with a class-based understanding of society now looked to be 'relevant' where they could.

¹⁰⁸ Saunders, 'Aspects of Aboveground Activity,' in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa: Volume 2*, 854.

¹⁰⁹ *SASO Newsletter*, 2, 3 (May/June 1972), 9.

¹¹⁰ University of Witwatersrand Historical Papers, Cullen Library (hereafter WHP) A2267 Joyce Harris Papers, folder '1968 – 1972,' J. Harris, 'Some thoughts on Black Consciousness' 15 November 1972, 3.

From 1971 NUSAS set out on a new course of radical action.¹¹¹ The NUSAS executive's decision to transform NUSAS into three separate affiliate bodies, concerned with social, educational and welfare matters, reflected their desire to respond to SASO. AQUARIUS, NUSED and NUSWEL were formed with the aim to 'expand the organisation's activities into specific areas of relevance', to signal 'a change in emphasis in NUSAS from talk to action' as well as marking a withdrawal from black politics and instead a direct engagement with white society.¹¹² The purpose of the new bodies was to work together, with NUSAS as the overall co-ordinating body, to influence and spread progressive ideas in the country. Aquarius rejected 'moribund materialism' and the consumer culture of the previous generation, rather seeking to reflect 'more humane moral beliefs' which they sought to spread through popular culture, using song, poetry and drama. NUSED, mirroring student protests in Britain, protested against the 'tyranny of examinations' and called for an 'education that liberates rather than oppresses' and which opened new ways of thinking. NUSWEL looked to engage students by bringing them into a closer relationship with the wider community, and took on the radical impulse to 'tackle problems at their roots, not just their symptoms'.¹¹³

Together the affiliate organisations and NUSAS were envisaged to become an 'outwards movement' that sought to overcome the individual isolation of campuses and to overcome the state-imposed 'racial and language barriers'.¹¹⁴ NUSAS's restructuring resonated with broader cultural changes in English-speaking youth in South Africa, specifically their embrace of the counterculture, which meshed particularly well with feelings of disengagement and distance, particular characteristics of South African Anglophone identity.¹¹⁵ The counterculture developed in South Africa as 'a space within which discourses could be explored'¹¹⁶ as a result of the traumatic lessons learnt from the ARM. While it was a small number of radicals who had access to New Left books, the counterculture – music in particular – was more accessible to ordinary students as it offered an inchoate blend of anti-

¹¹¹ Erbmann, 'Conservative Revolutionaries,' chapter 3.

¹¹² Pretorius, 'Where to now white student?' 7.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Lunn, 'Hippies, radicals and the Sounds of Silence'.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

establishment feeling that resonated with the rebellion of youth.¹¹⁷ Drugs, sexual freedom, music and clothing formed ‘a set of symbolic forms’¹¹⁸ associated with the global youth culture and were influences the apartheid government was increasingly uncomfortable with. The counterculture utilised technological innovation such as portable radios and the advent of airplane travel, to transmit the music of the ‘global youth culture’ and enabled a direct encounter with other societies that facilitated the taking of a critical perspective on South African society.¹¹⁹

Most significant of NUSAS’s attempts to create such an outward movement was its involvement in the Wages Commissions, which facilitated the reorganisation of Black trade unions.¹²⁰ On the national level, NUSAS were responsive to new challenges; at its July 1972 conference NUSAS delegates passed a motion that welcomed the decision by the *Rand Daily Mail*, *Daily Dispatch* and SAIRR to replace the term ‘non-white’ with ‘black’, a decision the conference regarded as ‘a valuable contribution to race relations’ in the country, and urged other public bodies and newspapers to do the same.¹²¹

In support of the Durban Strikes of early 1973, NUSAS launched a campaign to bring the labour crisis and the existing economic inequalities which had prompted them ‘out into open debate’.¹²² Discussion papers on issues from migrant labour and prison farms, to Black trade unions were circulated. In a statement the NUSAS executive and four SRC presidents expressed their enlarged sense of responsibility. White students enjoyed ‘a most privileged position in South African society, which brings great responsibilities’. They pledged ‘to fulfil these responsibilities to South Africa as a whole – including the oppressed majority’.¹²³

Government bannings significantly curtailed the activities of NUSAS. In June 1973 the government outlawed all outdoor gatherings in the centre of Cape Town, an action

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4 – 8.

¹¹⁸ Klimke and Scharloth, *1968 in Europe*, 6.

¹¹⁹ Lunn, ‘Hippies, radicals and the Sounds of Silence,’ 1 – 2.

¹²⁰ For discussions see G. Davie, ‘Strength in Numbers: The Durban Student Wages Commission, Dockworkers and the Poverty Datum Line, 1971-1973,’ *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 33, 2 (June 2007), 401 – 420. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, and also Keal, “‘A life’s work’: Harriet Bolton and Durban’s trade unions, 1944 – 1974’.

¹²¹ Minutes 48th Annual NUSAS Congress, 3 – 15 July 1972, 28. BC586 (b1VIII 1972), Manuscripts and Archives Department, University of Cape Town Libraries. Found at www.aluka.org (accessed on 10 September 2009). The opening address to the congress was given by Rev. Theo Kotze, head of the Cape branch of the Christian Institute.

¹²² *Race Relations News*, 35, 4, (April 1973), 2.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

which, together with restrictions on its national leadership, placed NUSAS on the back-foot until the outbreak of the student uprisings in Soweto.¹²⁴ The university revolts also galvanised SASO to reconsider its policy and adopt more confrontational forms of protest.¹²⁵

Conclusions

The conference hosted by the Abe Bailey Institute in January 1971 signposts a revealing nuance of South African student politics of the early 1970s. Although Saths Cooper dismissed most of the papers as irrelevant, the event held wider resonances. The meeting signalled that contact between white and black students persisted, and helped stimulate a wider moment of political revision. By 1971, with memories of the radical moment of the 1968 sit-ins, NUSAS had incorporated the counter-culture ideals of the European and American sixties, concretised by their decision to form an ‘outwards movement’ with the three affiliate organisation NUSWEL, NUSED and AQUARIUS. This was to bear most tangible fruit with the work of the Wages Commissions in the country. The ferment of the 1960s, combined with the new challenge of SASO activists, and compelled young white students to re-examine NUSAS’s structure and purpose, which had historically prioritised ‘contact’ amongst students of different races and had centred in the 1960s on the causes of academic freedom and university autonomy.

The University of the North, Turfloop became a critical focus for student politics. SASO chose to launch their new organisation at the university in July 1969. The plight of black students at Turfloop also galvanised NUSAS to publicise the black student struggles there. As one SASO’s most organised and committed black universities Turfloop became an acute focus of government investigation after Tiro was expelled sparking the countrywide university strikes of 1972. For a brief moment, it seemed, white students attempted to stand in solidarity with Turfloop students. When confronted with the attempt by white students to join in their cause, SASO asserted there could be no such student solidarity.

The SASO activists grew in self-confidence and ambition, which produced tangible political fruit in the establishment of the Black Peoples Convention (BPC) in 1972. The publication of *Creativity and Black Development* (1973), SASO’s first book publication, spelt out

¹²⁴ Erbmann, ‘Conservative Revolutionaries,’ chapter 3.

¹²⁵ This point is made strongly in J. Brown, ‘Public Protest and Violence in South Africa, 1948 – 1976,’ (D.Phil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2009), 146 – 178; and in Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 140 – 158.

the optimism and the challenge of Black Consciousness: 'the world has lost its humanity and it is our task, the task of Black poets to turn Blackness into the guiding cadence of true humanity'.¹²⁶ It was this sense of leadership, not just in terms of Pityana's assertion that the 'black man' was on his own, needing to take responsibility for himself, but it was a sense of leadership drawn from the sixties; new values and ideals were embodied in a political struggle, which would and 'must lead the world to a realisation of true humanity'.¹²⁷ The ideas of New Left thinkers, popularised and explained by the newly returned Turner, also provided an injection of fresh thinking for white students, the effect of which was particularly pronounced in the wake of the SASO split in 1968.

The creative intellectual ferment of the 1960s provided the tools and space for young black intellectuals to interpret and recast intellectual trajectories they possessed to hand. As the following chapter will examine, black students also set a limit to the democratic remit of their political discourse, and muted the analytical and political challenge to Black Consciousness of second wave feminism. The feminist insight that the personal (gender) was irrevocably political resonated discordantly with the Black Consciousness politicisation of identity on the basis of race and masculinity.

¹²⁶ B.J. Langa (ed.), *Creativity and Black Development* (Durban: SASO Publications, 1973), 59.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

Categories of Struggle: Black Consciousness and Feminism in South Africa in the 1970s

Ours was not a feminist cause at that time. Feminism was a later development in my political consciousness – but an insistence on being taken seriously as activists in our own right amongst our peers.

– Mamphela Ramphele, 1995¹

We were in a way feminists. For instance we believed in Angela Davis. We believed in her and we admired the way she was going on with the Jacksons and what have you. And active in the Black Panther movement.

– Deborah Matshoba, 2007²

Gender³ and women's liberation remain a contentious question and blindspot in the history⁴ of the Black Consciousness movement. The issue has been addressed in various places; Mamphela Ramphele, for instance, has examined gender dynamics within the movement.⁵ Recently, M. J. Oshadi Mangena engaged with Black Consciousness and what she refers to as 'the woman's question'. Mangena claims that in the Black Consciousness movement concerns about 'gender sensitivity' were tacitly endorsed through the acknowledgement of women as competent leaders in their own right. She maintains that an

¹ Ramphele, *Across Boundaries*, 66.

² A. Alexander, A. Mngxitama, 'Interview with Deborah Matshoba,' in Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives!*, 281.

³ An earlier version of this chapter appeared as I. Macqueen, 'Categories of Struggle: Reassessing Black Consciousness in South Africa through Gender, 1967 – 1976,' in C. Salvaterra, B. Waaldijk (eds.), *Paths to Gender: European Historical Perspectives on Women and Men* (Pisa: Plus-Pisa University Press, 2009), 259 – 270.

⁴ One of the first explicitly feminist interventions into South African historiography was B. Bozzoli's 'Marxism, Feminism and Southern African Studies,' *Journal of Southern African Studies* 9 (1983), 122-139. Also in W. Beinart, S. Dubow (eds.), *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth Century South Africa*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 118-144. More recent feminist perspectives on South Africa have also challenged the theoretical assumptions of social history, on which the radical generation of South African historians leant heavily. J. Robinson, '(Dis)locating Historical Narrative: Writing, Space and Gender in South African Social History,' *South African Historical Journal*, 30, (1994), 144 – 157.

⁵ M. Ramphele, 'The Dynamics of Gender Within Black Consciousness Organisations: A Personal View,' in Pityana et al., *Bounds of Possibility*, 214 – 227.

overt concern with women's emancipation was downplayed and that 'gender was blurred and dissolved into the larger and deeper struggle for the liberation of the Black people'.⁶

The chapter will use gender to reflect critically on the humanism of Black Consciousness. At its core Black Consciousness was a humanist affirmation of black dignity, which *ipso facto*, resonated with the ecumenical ideal, New Left Marxism and the existentialist thrust of secular theology. The chapter will show that Black Consciousness ideals were more readily congruent with these progressive movements of the 1960s and 1970s than with feminism, and that SASO chose to distance itself from the cause of women's liberation. In this respect SASO activists conformed to the pattern of nationalist discourse, rather than transcending it, as was the case in their conversation with other progressive movements committed to social change. The humanist roots of Black Consciousness thought and its links to Fanon's revolutionary humanism, which scholars like Nigel Gibson have emphasised, makes the positioning of SASO activists on the woman's question in South Africa, a salient qualification of the limits of its humanism.⁷ This contradiction of Black Consciousness indicate a tension between it being an open, radical and progressive discourse on the one hand, and on the other its narrower function as a liberation ideology that prioritised black national liberation over women's liberation.

The chapter will argue the following points: (1) There were levels or categories of struggle within the BCM (what Stephanie Urdang and others writing of Africa's independence struggles have called the 'women's struggle within the struggle'⁸). (2) The Black Consciousness rhetoric of black 'manhood' rights paradoxically provided black women in the movement with an empowering discourse that could be appropriated to challenge 'traditional' gender norms. In this respect Maimela's insight, to see the tension between the *rhetoric* of the BCM and the *reality* of their organisational praxis resonates, but in respect of gender rather than race. (3) Black Consciousness fostered an important but limited 'revolutionary humanism' in South Africa that could be adapted to fit a broader social consciousness further down the line. Black Consciousness activists, like Ramphela, who initially had a hostile attitude towards the project of feminism (viewing it as a dangerous

⁶ M.J. Oshadi Mangena, 'The Black Consciousness Philosophy and the Woman's Question, 1970 – 1980,' in Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives!*, 260.

⁷ N. Gibson, 'Black Consciousness after Biko: The Dialectics of Liberation in South Africa, 1977-1987,' in Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives!*, 129-155; and also J. Alan, L. Turner, *Frantz Fanon, Soweto and American Black Thought*, (Chicago: News and Letters, 1986).

⁸ S. Urdang, *Fighting Two Colonialisms: Women in Guinea-Bissau* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979); J. Kimble, 'The Struggle within the Struggle,' *Feminist Review*, 8 (1981), 107 – 111.

distraction from the cause of Black liberation), would later broaden out their concerns to encompass an awareness of gender and class, as well as race.

Gender as an Analytical Category

The chapter will use Joan Scott's definition of gender as: 'a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes' and, as 'a primary way of signifying relationships of power'.⁹ Engaging with gender can therefore provide 'a way to decode meaning and to understand the complex connections among various forms of human interaction.' Gender thus enables historians to 'develop insight into the reciprocal nature of gender and society and into the particular and contextually specific ways in which politics constructs gender and gender constructs politics'.¹⁰ This interplay between gender and politics lies at the heart of the thesis, as gender problematised the Black Consciousness vision that conflated Blackness with maleness and the oppressed with people of colour. The analytical kernel of feminism, which emphasised the close and historically fundamental relationship between 'private' and 'public' spheres, struck a deeply discordant chord with Black Consciousness, which similarly politicised the personal but on the analytical grounds of race rather than of gender.

Earlier studies have flagged 'gender discrimination' in Black Consciousness as a major blind spot. In his study of Black Consciousness writers, Kelwyn Sole argued that 'problems of gender domination were practically non-existent in Black Consciousness thought up until the early 1980s'. He labels the tone of their rhetoric as 'phallogocentric,' explaining that 'issues of oppression were interpreted according to male issues and male discourse'.¹¹ He argues that gender was not engaged with as a political issue, but that the most pressing cause was 'the crippling of the manhood of black men by apartheid laws'.¹² Despite pointing to the lack of serious engagement with, or awareness of, gender as determinate in the multiple forms of oppression experienced in South Africa, Sole acknowledges that Black Consciousness could, paradoxically, be experienced by 'many of its female adherents as a

⁹ J. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,' *American Historical Review*, 91, 5 (1986), 1067.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1070.

¹¹ K.E. Sole, 'Authority, authenticity and the black writer: depictions and community in selected fictional black consciousness texts,' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Witwatersrand, 1993), 51.

¹² *Ibid.*

liberating doctrine, allowing them more psychological and intellectual stimulation'.¹³ He notes that most of the women in SASO were from the small, urbanised professional class 'becoming involved in community and self-help projects or as "significant others"'. In spite of this demographic, he notes that 'the spheres of socio-political operation defined for women by Black Consciousness remained essentially domestic and nurturing'.¹⁴ While Sole's insights are revealing, his claim that Black Consciousness leaders did not engage with gender as a political issue needs to be qualified in several respects. As the chapter will argue, Black Consciousness activists did engage with feminism as a political issue, but in a way that deprecated its significance and asserted the primacy of the cause of Black liberation.

Masculinities and Femininities in SASO

The political and economic changes of the 1960s and 1970s had direct bearing on the construction of gender identities among black South Africans, and these changes were reflected in the preoccupation of Black Consciousness leaders. Masculinities in South Africa were profoundly shaped by 'class and race factors,' as Robert Morrell has argued.¹⁵ Increased urbanisation gave rise to a new black masculinity which, although 'oppositional to the state,' still held conservative views over the place of women. By the 1970s economic recession and the government's increased repression, combined to alter previous ideas of masculinity as associated with self-control and instead 'a tough masculinity' associated with Black Consciousness emerged, encapsulated by the slogan 'Black man, you are on your own'.¹⁶

This slogan has been used as a point of reference to criticise Black Consciousness's masculine identity politics. In defence of Black Consciousness, activists have argued that the apparent gender bias of the phrase is due to the English language, where 'man' is generic shorthand for 'human'. Daniel Magaziner has recently suggested that the 'man' is worth a second look.¹⁷ He demonstrates that claims to black manhood were central to early articulations of Black Consciousness and argues that 'manhood' was 'perhaps the most basic

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁵ R. Morrell, 'Of Boys and Men: Masculinity and Gender in Southern African Studies,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 24, 4 (1998), 607.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 627.

¹⁷ D. Magaziner, 'Pieces of a (Wo)man: The Politics of Gender and Identity in Black Consciousness, 1968 – 1977,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, In press.

element of Black Consciousness efforts to recast black identity'.¹⁸ Biko, for example, alluding to the same historical changes sketched out by Morrell, remarked that before the 1960s black people 'were oppressed but they were still men'. By the late 1960s, in contrast, he lamented: 'the type of black man we have today has lost his manhood'.¹⁹ Here it can be seen that Biko's primary concern was with the oppressed black man, with the most painfully felt consequence being the loss of black manhood. The black activist psychiatrist Chabani Manganyi described the situation faced by black men in South Africa as one of emasculation, making the psychoanalytic observation that '[i]f we were to formulate [the black man's] psychic status in a phenomenological way, we could say that his subjective experience is one of feeling emasculated'.²⁰

Black Consciousness was designed to address this Black emasculation, to make 'the black man come to himself,' to 'pump back life into his empty shell; to infuse him with pride and dignity, to remind him of his complicity in the crime of allowing himself to be misused'. This reclamation of lost manhood was made synonymous by Biko with an 'inward looking process' and was the 'definition of 'black consciousness.'²¹ His vision was echoed by fellow-leader and SASO president, Barney Pityana, who emphasised the 'new vision' of Black Consciousness as 'hope and confidence [that] will give out more the "black personality." It will give me, a black man, a sense of security and belonging'²². In both formulations, Biko and Pityana articulated the concerns of Black Consciousness from their male perspective, with the dominant concern being the rehabilitation of black masculinity. A normative judgement of the good of masculine characteristics was thus implicitly made and the critical stance of Black Consciousness activists, which typically questioned received values and political aims, bypassed a critical engagement with this reclamation of lost manhood.

In her review of gender dynamics in the BCM, activist Mamphela Ramphele argued that women who were recognised as leaders in their own right had to become 'one of the boys'; where successful, they were accorded 'honorary male status'.²³ A politically liberated

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Biko, *I Write*, 30.

²⁰ N.C. Manganyi, *Being-Black-in-the-World*, (Johannesburg: Spro-cas/Ravan Press, 1973), 10–11, cited in D. Driver, 'M'a Ngoana O Tsoare 'Thipa ka Bohaleng' – The Child's Mother Grabs the Sharp End of the Knife: Women as Mothers, Women as Writers,' in M. Trump (ed.) *Rendering Things Visible: Essays on South African Literary Culture* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1990), 235.

²¹ Biko, *I Write*, 31.

²² N. Pityana, 'The Politics of Powerlessness,' *SASO Newsletter* (September 1970), 10.

²³ Ramphele, 'The Dynamics of Gender,' 219 – 220.

black identity was thus inherently gendered; it was of necessity powerful, assertive, or more colloquially, 'masculine'. Although women played an active, even 'a crucial role' as Maimela asserts, without which Black Consciousness 'could never have exerted the crucial influence that it did on the history of South Africa if the contribution had been absent',²⁴ their contribution was subsumed and contributed to the dominant discourse of black manhood rights. Thus, even where a female activist like Ramphela insisted on equality, it was only granted to the extent that her stance was recognised in masculine terms, rather than recognising the nuances of her struggle as a black woman activist. For Ramphela to become 'one of the boys' entailed adopting a 'male' identity, that equated the liberated black person with the black man.

Historical Antecedents, Partners in Struggle? The African National Congress Women's League

Whereas the uniqueness of Black Consciousness in relation to the politics of the ANC and PAC has been emphasised, there were strong similarities, in this context, with SASO's reticence to acknowledge the salience of 'the woman's question,' as Mangena calls it. SASO was rooted in a rich history of women's struggles against the state, and a history of struggle for political representation by women against the patriarchy of the ANC leadership itself. Women were initially not admitted to membership when the South African National Native Congress formed in 1912, later to become the ANC in 1923. It was only nineteen years later, in 1931, that the Bantu Women's League under the leadership of Charlotte Maxeke became affiliated to the ANC as its *de facto* women's wing. Women were still only formally admitted into the ANC in 1941 and the formation of the official ANC Women's League (ANCWL) only followed in 1948.²⁵

Attempts to extend the carrying of passes to African women was a central factor that mobilised women in the 1950s and led to their famous 26 000-strong march on the Union Buildings in Pretoria in August 1956. The march was organised by the Federation of South African Women, which was affiliated to the ANC, drew support from the white Congress of Democrats, and included leaders like Helen Joseph.²⁶ The 1956 march also had precedents, as

²⁴ Maimela, 'Black Consciousness and White Liberals,' 16.

²⁵ 'A Short History of the ANC Women's League'. Found at <http://www.anc.org.za/wl/docs/history.html> (accessed on 10 June 2009).

²⁶ Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa*, 144.

the Union government's decision to impose passes on African women in 1913 evoked a similar show of defiance when women marched on Bloemfontein in protest, breaking with the ANC's accepted approach where '[d]eputations, petitions, and reasoned argument were the preferred tactics adopted by Congressmen at this stage'.²⁷ In the same year, Indian women were involved in Gandhi's passive resistance campaign, organised against the Immigration Act that forbade Indians residence in the Transvaal. Through their participation in Gandhi's passive resistance, women were able to temporarily break 'through the constraints of cultural, religious norms which strongly emphasised submissiveness and passivity in women'.²⁸

In an analysis of the 1956 march, but making an observation that is more broadly applicable, Shireen Hassim observes that rather than being remembered as women mobilising around a *women's* issue, the protest was subsumed within a broader narrative of national liberation, 'appropriated' as 'part of a popular front' of Congress political activism.²⁹ The uniqueness of the protest, mobilised specifically against the extension of passes to women was downplayed, and the heroism of the women who took part in the march, with the implied challenge to the patriarchy of the traditional male leadership of the ANC itself, conveniently situated as part of the broader narrative of the 1950s Defiance campaign.

The sublimation of women's struggles to a more generic 'political' struggle has been compounded by the theoretical literature, Hassim suggests, which has employed the theoretical concept of the 'triple oppression' of women (as women, Black and as workers). Hassim takes aim at the heuristic value of the concept and suggests the idea lacks depth, as it reinforces rather than challenges the assumption that the women's struggle is only *additive* to the national and class struggle, rather than constituting a unique and particular form of oppression.³⁰ To regard the women's struggle in this way, she concludes, gives the ubiquitous women's wing theoretical justification, as its purpose is only to address women's 'additional' concerns as differentiated from mainstream political goals.³¹ The result is a failure to challenge the hegemonic 'male vision of the world'.³²

²⁷ S. Dubow, *The African National Congress* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2000), 6.

²⁸ C. Walker, 'The Woman's Suffrage Movement in South Africa,' *Communications*, 2, Centre of African Studies, University of Cape Town (1979), 32.

²⁹ S. Hassim, 'Gender, Social Location, and Feminist Politics in South Africa,' *Transformation*, 15 (1991), 69.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 68-9.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 75.

The focus whereby gender differences were subsumed within a dominant, implicitly ‘masculinist’ national liberation focus, held sway in the ANC until as late as the mid-1980s. Mavis Nhlapo, a representative of the ANC women’s secretariat, commented in 1981 that sexual politics and the problem of male domination were ‘secondary to the primary goal of the struggle’.³³ At the 1985 ‘Conference on Women’ in Nairobi, the ANC delegation argued that ‘[i]t would be suicidal for us to adopt feminist ideas. Our enemy is the system and we cannot exhaust our energies on women’s issues’.³⁴ It was only at end of the 1980s that the ANC became more responsive to the unique concerns of South African women. In 1989 the ANC organised seminars in London on ‘Feminism and National Liberation,’ where participants were able to treat feminism as a legitimate concern in its own right for the first time. On 2 May 1990 the ANC issued its ‘Statement on the Emancipation of Women,’ which dismissed the assumption that women’s emancipation would be a simple by-product of the democratic struggle. The ANC’s statement was ‘unprecedented in placing South African women’s resistance in an international context and in granting feminism independent historical agency’.³⁵ It had taken almost fifty years for the ANC to fully acknowledge the salience of the women’s struggle.

A comparison of the role of women in the ANCWL and the BCM requires first the recognition of the different circumstances of their political activism. The former were aligned with a banned underground organisation committed to an armed struggle, whilst the latter emerged from within the institutional spaces of apartheid itself. There is no evidence of similar abuses within the BCM that occurred under the exigencies of the armed struggle within *Umkhonto we Sizwe*.³⁶ In contrast, the nature of the BCM was linked closely to grassroots mobilisation, ‘conscientisation’ and community development, and allowed space for individual growth and differences in opinion, rather than the demand of following a strict party line. It requires, therefore, a closer look at the micro-politics of SASO, to determine how Black Consciousness activists deflected the force of the feminist critique, and how women rationalised their roles within SASO as a qualified form of feminism.

³³ A. McClintock, “‘No Longer in a Future Heaven’: Women and Nationalism in South Africa,” *Transition* 51 (1991), 118.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 119.

³⁶ The TRC hearings revealed some of the abuses that happened to female cadres who were accused of being spies. Note for instance the harrowing testimony of Rita Mazibuko in A. Krog, *Country of My Skull: Second Edition* (Johannesburg: Random House, 2002), 183-184.

Categories of Struggle: SASO's Internal Politics

How did gender struggles play out in SASO? Ramphele reflects how the SASO technique of caucusing to force concessions and resolutions through at conferences was used by Black women within the movement as well. While a medical student at UNB, Ramphele was able to grow in self-confidence and learnt to be aggressive towards men who were dismissive towards her, noting 'I intimidated men who did not expect aggression from women'.³⁷ As she remembers, '[s]oon a group of similarly inclined women, Vuyelwa Mashalaba, Nomsisi Kraai, Deborah Matshoba and Thenjiwe Mthintso, became a force to be reckoned with at annual SASO meetings'.³⁸ National women student leaders also emerged who played leading roles within the movement. For instance Deborah Matshoba held the position as literacy director of SASO. Daphne Masekela was a notable leader at Turfloop.³⁹

The June 1971 issue of *SASO Newsletter* noted that female SASO Executive member, Vuyelwa Mashalaba, was sent to the campus of Fort Hare. As SASO president for 1971, Pityana was still banned from Fort Hare for his purported involvement in strikes on the campus, for which he had been expelled. The majority of students at Fort Hare were reticent about forming an SRC, which could be targeted and manipulated by the university administration. But the hostility to overt political representation extended to SASO. The newsletter remarked that the local SASO leadership had 'lost favour with the students'.⁴⁰ The Fort Hare students also showed a worrying interest to participate in the multiracial student conference organised by the liberal University of Witwatersrand SRC for July, an initiative which SASO had condemned in its newsletter the previous month, as a dangerous 'red herring across the track' for its attempt to stimulate 'dialogue' between white and black students.⁴¹

Mashalaba was sent to Fort Hare for 'SASO Day' on 10 May 1971. This was a national celebration that SASO inaugurated in 1971, inspired by a Turfloop initiative the previous year, that set aside a week to heighten student awareness and commitment on the campus to SASO. For the 1971 SASO Day celebrations Pityana addressed the University of

³⁷ Ramphele, *Across Boundaries*, 66.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ M.V. Mzamane, B. Maaba and N. Biko, 'The Black Consciousness Movement,' in South African Democracy Education Trust (ed.), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2*, 135.

⁴⁰ *SASO Newsletter*, 1, 2 (June 1971), 5.

⁴¹ *SASO Newsletter*, 1, 1 (May 1971), 11.

the North, SASO vice-president and international relations officer, Charles Sibisi, spoke to the University of Zululand, and Steve Biko shared a platform with Gees Abram at a symposium at UNB on 'Positivity in Negritude'.⁴² The topic of Mashalaba's address was 'Communication as a Facet of SASO Policy,' which she delivered to Fort Hare and the Federal Seminary at Alice.

Mashalaba's visit to Fort Hare was referred to enigmatically in the following month's *SASO Newsletter*, '[h]er visit has apparently inspired the women-folk (who have always felt neglected at Fort Hare) more than anybody else'.⁴³ The statement was revealing. In a politically sensitive situation, where SASO needed to win over the student body to its policy and curtail dialogue with white organisations, Mashalaba's address was particularly resonant with 'the women-folk' at Fort Hare. The description by the editor itself trivialised and deprecated the significance of the gathering. Mashalaba's success at communicating an inspiring message to female students at Fort Hare, in contrast to the lack of support for SASO from the wider student body, suggests that she used her SASO mandate to address the particular concerns of female students at Fort Hare. The treatment of the event by the newsletter, which situated the concerns of 'the women folk' in parentheses, indicated a narrative sidelining of their concerns. For SASO, that placed so much emphasis on the frustration and alienation suffered by the black student, it constituted a significant and deliberate omission. If Biko was able to dedicate lengthy psychological analysis to the plight of black manhood, the concerns of black female students were evidently not considered as important.

And yet, Mashalaba had taken a stand at Fort Hare and inspired women at the university. Bennie Khoapa, later to become director of the Black Community Programmes and who worked for the YMCA in Durban, had his first experience of SASO through Mashalaba, and it was an encounter in which gender was a contested category. Khoapa had returned from a nine-month trip to the United States on the invitation of the YMCA of the United States and Canada, which he had taken in 1968. The trip opened his eyes – he had arrived in Harlem three months after the assassination of Martin Luther King. On his return to South Africa in 1969 Dr Lawrence Schlemmer, a member of the SAIRR and a Senior Research Fellow of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Natal,⁴⁴ asked

⁴² *SASO Newsletter*, 1, 2 (June 1971), 9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Horrell, *Survey of Race Relations: 1968*, 16.

Khoapa to speak at a seminar in Durban on his experiences in the United States. Khoapa had 'lots to talk about,' among the topics being his exposure to renewed debates of racial integration vis-à-vis separation in the United States, of whether Martin Luther King Jr. or Malcolm X held the correct approach.

At the end of the seminar, Khoapa recalled that the discussion moved to address cultural change, particularly the 'emergence of permissiveness,' and that he was challenged by 'some feminists' in the audience, particularly by Mashalaba, for an alleged sexist comment he made. This was Khoapa's introduction to SASO, and Biko, who Khoapa describes as having a 'gift of being tuned in and finding out,' invited him to participate in another seminar on blackness along with Ezekiel Mphahlele and M.T. Moerane, editor of *The World*. Here sexism was raised by Mashalaba, prior to Khoapa's engagement with blackness.⁴⁵ The encounter indicated that an awareness of sexism was present among some in SASO ranks, and even emphasised by Mashalaba in the public sphere in Durban.

* * *

Interaction within SASO extended beyond meetings and conferences to the personal relationships of individual participants in the movement. Biko's personal life involved multiple relationships with women in the movement and he developed a reputation in some quarters, unfairly or not, as a womaniser. Biko was fond of partying and '*gumbas*' were a prominent feature of SASO social life. Memories of the '*gumbas*' and their legacy on the UNB medical school were deeply problematic for many female students, who often felt objectified and used. The masculinities of the SASO student culture, closely aligned to a new-found political assertion, were difficult to distinguish from overt sexism towards women members of the student organisation. This created a distinct culture at the UNB Medical School, lasting until the 1980s, which many female students remembered later with pain and bitterness.⁴⁶ Sympathetic accounts of Biko's womanising, such as that of Lindy Wilson's, portray Biko to be caught in a triangular love relationship between his wife, Ntsiki, and Ramphele, and resorting to casual relationships with other women as a source of escape, rather than revealing a misogynist streak in his character. Biko's personal life did, however, show a conservatism that maintained more traditional expectations of the women he was involved with, to be faithful and dutiful, while he followed a more permissive moral code.

⁴⁵ Bennie Khoapa, interview with David Wiley, 07 May 2006, Durban. My thanks to David Trumbull for this reference. Found at: <http://overcomingapartheid.msu.edu/video.php?id=84> (accessed on 16 July 2010).

⁴⁶ V. Noble, 'Doctors divided: Gender, race and class anomalies in the production of black medical doctors in apartheid South Africa, 1948 to 1994,' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Michigan, 2005), Chapter 5.

The Durban Medical School, or UNB, was a vital centre of Black Consciousness activism and thinking, and an engagement with the gender dynamics of the BCM should take account of the nature of relationships that were a feature there.⁴⁷ The 'bush' universities from which SASO drew its students were subject to tight control by the government, with strict division of male and female students and an emphasis on conservative values. UNB was an different to the closely-policed precincts of the 'bush' universities in that it allowed students more freedom to socialise. On one level, SASO provided a safe and affirming group for the students who became involved. The national office, which was based from 1969 until early 1971 in the Alan Taylor residence, was led with the integrity and humanity characteristic of people like Biko and Pityana.

Notwithstanding their romantic involvement, Ramphele reflects on the emotional support she received from Biko as a comrade and as a friend. Ramphele's own account of her politicisation within SASO shows how the self-definition and empowerment that the movement was all about, could easily rub off on a competent and assertive individual like Ramphele. Through SASO's national leadership conferences and formation schools, she developed critical leadership skills and political judgement. Together with her medical degree, earned at Durban Medical School, the training was vital to enable her to take a leading role in later running the Zanempilo Community Health Centre in the village of Zinyoka in the Ciskei homeland.⁴⁸ The clinic was predominantly run by women; Ramphele worked as head medical officer with a team of seven nursing sisters, a female secretary and social worker.⁴⁹

By all accounts the women involved in the BCM were strong and articulate individuals, rather than merely being adoring acolytes. The SASO activists embraced the student culture of the 1960s, with a rebellion against traditional taboos about alcohol and smoking. Heavy drinking on the weekends was a marked feature of student life at Alan Taylor residence. Women in the movement had to overcome the traditional resistance against women smoking and drinking to become fully integrated into SASO's activities. Ramphele

⁴⁷ Noble observes that the 'Durban school... provided the necessary space for political discussions to take place amongst many students of different social and cultural backgrounds, which facilitated the emergence of a powerful Black Consciousness student politics in the late 1960s and 1970s'. Noble, 'Doctors Divided,' xi – xii.

⁴⁸ For a new study drawing on oral history sources, see L. Hadfield, 'Biko, Black Consciousness, and 'the System' eZinyoka: Oral History and Black Consciousness in Practice in a Rural Ciskei Village,' *South African Historical Journal*, 62, 1 (2010), 78 – 99. See also L. Hadfield, 'Restoring Human Dignity and Building Self-Reliance: Youth, Women and Churches and Black Consciousness Community Development, South Africa, 1969 – 1977,' (Ph.D. thesis, Michigan State University, 2010).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 94. Aelred Stubbs evocatively described Zanempilo as 'the incarnate symbol of Black Consciousness' because the spirit of Black Consciousness was 'expressed in the black-designed, black-built buildings, but above all in the staff who serviced it.' A. Stubbs, 'Martyr of Hope: A Personal Memoir,' in Biko, *I Write*, 192.

and her fellow female colleagues threw off the restraints of their conservative upbringings, and adopted a risqué style of dress. Hot pants and platform shoes large enough to be used against the security police were favourites. The 'Black is beautiful' slogan was adopted from the United States and SASO women stopped using the skin lightening creams and wigs that were the mainstay of popular culture as presented through newspaper advertisements in papers such as *Ilanga Lase Natal*.⁵⁰ The traditional values of sobriety, restraint and decorum, applied most strictly to women, were thus thrown off as part of a 'Black and Proud' persona inspired notably by Angela Davis and the female members of the Black Panthers. Matshoba reflects on this adopted identity, commenting that 'we were in a way feminists'. She remarks that they 'believed in Angela Davis' and her involvement in the Black Panther movement.⁵¹

The traditionally-held, conservative views of African women required female SASO activists to be extreme in counteracting these perceptions. 'As a woman, an African woman at that, one had to be outrageous to be heard, let alone taken seriously,' Ramphele reflects.⁵² Donald Woods, the liberal editor of *The Daily Dispatch* in Port Elizabeth, remembers the shock he received when confronted in his office by the young and confident Mamphela Ramphele, a 'black bombshell of a girl', demanding loudly to know why he was giving columns to the homeland leaders Buthelezi and Mantanzima, and decrying Biko and Black Consciousness as a backward, aberrant and dangerous Black racism.⁵³

Traditional values were an additional political and personal challenge for black women, like Ramphele, who were often expected to do the catering and household chores on SASO leadership weekends in addition to their other roles. Ramphele and Matshoba both recall an occasion at Zanempilo clinic where they forced their way into the traditional male preserve of savouring the sheep's brain, a delicacy customarily barred to women.⁵⁴ As Deborah Matshoba recalls vividly, SASO women 'asserted' themselves 'in the organization'. She recounts that she 'started smoking like [the men]. And especially to make this 'gumba material' [non-SASO women] feel out of place. Smoking, and we wore our hot pants. We spoke loud!' On some of the eating arrangements she comments: '[w]e would get food and

⁵⁰ For a discussion see L.M. Thomas, 'Skin Lighteners in South Africa: Transnational Entanglements and Technologies of the Self,' in E.N. Glenn (ed.), *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Colour Matters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 188 – 209.

⁵¹ Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives!*, 281.

⁵² Ramphele, *Across Boundaries*, 71.

⁵³ Woods, *Biko*, 47.

⁵⁴ Ramphele, *Across Boundaries*, 105 and Mngxitama, *Biko Lives!*, 280.

insist that [the men] should go and wash their hands so that we could all eat together. They wanted to take big portions for themselves. We'd say "No, anybody who wants to eat, eats." Just like that'.⁵⁵

Matshoba's and Ramphele's remarks show that the feminism that SASO women adopted was to a large extent embodied in their dress, habits and making a stand over the unfair balance of domestic duties. Matshoba's remark about 'gumba material' referred to 'outside' women who were brought along to 'add glamour to the parties',⁵⁶ but did not belong to the BCM. The motives for making them 'feel out of place' could be explained by the fact that they were outsiders, but also because the outside women were more compliant and subservient. Fort Hare student activist Thenjiwe Mtintso emphasised, '[w]e would have our revolts... They do want women to be political, to be active, to be everything, but they still need a complement of women who are subservient'.⁵⁷ The outside women who had not been 'conscientised' and were regarded as subservient, undermined the embodied form of struggle and the hard-fought concessions that female activists had won within the movement. By talking loudly, smoking and demanding equality in eating arrangements, female activists asserted their right to personal freedom from traditional constraints. Outside women, who typically gave in to pressures to fulfil more traditional roles, constituted a threat by association to the liberated Black woman, and also indicated that the stand women in the BCM took was not just for personal privilege but was a matter of principle.

Black Consciousness and the 'Black Nation'

It emerged as a pattern for national liberation movements of southern Africa that women's involvement in politics in the region until the 1980s 'happened largely on terms set by men'.⁵⁸ Although women often played a significant role in the nationalist movements, as 'a major driving force sometimes egging on men and taking initiatives', their 'specific interests were subordinated under nationalist agendas'.⁵⁹ It will be argued that the discursive formulation of Black Consciousness conformed to this trend. SASO activists were

⁵⁵ Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives!*, 280.

⁵⁶ Wilson, 'Steve Biko: A Life,' in Pityana et al., *Bounds of Possibility*, 60.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ G. Geisler, *Women and the Remaking of Politics in Southern Africa: Negotiating Autonomy, Incorporation and Representation* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2004), 23.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

furthermore alert to the danger of potential division in the ranks of Black solidarity that the women's struggle could precipitate. As we have seen, the SASO students were drawn from the urbanising black elite, and the apartheid state envisaged that their future role was to be in local government in their respective homelands. The state's attempts to divide black interests in this way called for vigilance from SASO, and it followed that any initiative that could separate students from the people needed to be avoided.

Activist Deborah Matshoba remembered that her attempt in the early 1970s to establish a Women's Student Organisation in Durban, as a branch within SASO, was quickly vetoed by Biko and her male comrades. The danger would be, as Biko put it, 'if you are WSO you are not SASO' and 'so now you have two roles'.⁶⁰ Part of the threat that Matshoba posed was that she had a distinct identity as a woman who belonged to the YWCA. She had gained international exposure through that organisation when she represented South Africa at a YWCA conference in Ghana in 1971, and she had been mentored by the social workers and YWCA activists Ellen Kuzwayo and Joyce Seroke.⁶¹ Matshoba was sent to Durban by the YWCA 'to mobilize young girls and recruit for the Y teens' and she worked in the YWCA office, which was downstairs from the SASO office at 86 Beatrice Street in downtown Durban,⁶² after SASO had been forced to leave the Alan Taylor residence in 1971.

At the office in Beatrice Street, Matshoba was heckled by 'the SASO guys' for her 'bourgeois' connections, which they equated with eating 'biscuits and tea in meetings,' whereas 'SASO guys' ate the presumably proletarian 'bunny chow'.⁶³ Biko was alert to the challenge posed by Matshoba, although he dealt with the situation with characteristic humour and sensitivity. "You guys have to admit you are very powerful," – that's how Steve would put it' Matshoba recalls, but there was no possibility that a WSO, as 'a branch within' that Matshoba envisaged, could be formed. Biko's deft handling of the situation still showed that the YWCA programme was viewed as a threat by SASO to its own attempts at conscientisation to create a united Black front to challenge the apartheid state. Here, competing progressive visions both laid claim to the oppressed, and Biko moved to close down the second front that Matshoba wanted to establish. As the so-called 'YWCA woman'

⁶⁰ Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives!*, 279.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 280.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 279.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 281. Reference to a popular food in Durban, consisting of curries served with a half loaf of bread.

who wanted to ‘influence others’,⁶⁴ the SASO activists viewed Matshoba as a potential threat to their own efforts to conscientise the people.

Although SASO was a radical student organisation, it conformed to a broader pattern evident in other nationalist organisations (such as the South West African Peoples Organisation and the ANC), which conflated what was supposed to be women’s ‘traditional’ domestic roles with their political roles. In 1975 the Black Women’s Federation (BWF) was founded under the presidency of noted Durban academic and Indian activist, Fatima Meer. As in other contexts, like the ANC’s Women’s League (ANCWL), the creation of a distinct women’s organisation tended to result in ‘women’s specific concerns’ being ‘marginalised and depoliticised’ with women viewed primarily as ‘struggle helpers’.⁶⁵ The preamble to the BWF, for instance, effectively defined women’s sphere of responsibility as the family and ‘socialization of the youth’. The BWF also linked the significance of motherhood to the fulfilment of Black ‘social, cultural, economic and political aspirations’.⁶⁶

SASO drew its inspiration for such gendered politics from Africa’s nationalist leaders. The first *SASO Newsletter* included a poem by the Senegalese president and poet, Leopold Senghor, that eulogised: ‘Naked woman, black woman/I sing your beauty that passes, the form I/fix in the eternal, Before jealous fate turns you to ashes to feed/the roots of life’.⁶⁷ Drawing on the experience of the African liberation struggles helped to provide legitimacy for emphasising a narrower discourse of women’s domesticity. Even the independent and assertive Deborah Matshoba, who had suggested forming a WSO, reminded readers in an article in 1973 of the central role women had played in independent Black states.⁶⁸ Matshoba aligned this politically important role with women’s structural position as mothers. She stressed to readers that ‘[c]hildren need to be made aware in their early formative years’. Black children needed to ‘talk, eat, live, cry and play the struggle for liberation’. It was the responsibility of women to ‘plant this Black tree that is going to bear Black fruit’.⁶⁹ If Matshoba later characterised herself and female Black Consciousness activists as ‘in a way

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Geisler, *Women and the Remaking of Politics in Southern Africa*, 23-4.

⁶⁶ A. Rambally (ed.), *Black Review 1975-6* (Lovedale: Black Community Programmes, 1977), 133. Cited in K. Moodley, ‘The Continued Impact of Black Consciousness,’ in Pityana et al., *Bounds of Possibility*, 147-8.

⁶⁷ *SASO Newsletter*, August 1970, 7.

⁶⁸ D. Matshoba, ‘Woman: Whither Thou?’, *SASO Newsletter*, 3, 1 (March/April 1973), 5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

feminists,' it is apparent that their feminism did not openly challenge the idea that part of women's particular contribution to the Black struggle was in their role as mothers.

Their embrace of domesticity does warrant questioning, especially as in other respects SASO women were very much like other student activists of the 1960s and 1970s, who read widely and engaged critically with the socio-political structures and values of the world. Part of SASO's limitations in coming to terms with an emergent feminist critique was due to the philosophy of Black Consciousness itself, which rhetorically rejected dialogue with white groups and viewed claims to women's liberation with great suspicion. SASO activists had distanced themselves from so-called 'mixed movements' like the UCM and their attendant lack of political direction. The progressive ideas that the UCM sought to import to South African student circles through creative liturgies and discussion groups, which included an engagement with feminist critiques of the world, were regarded warily by SASO as well.⁷⁰

Losing the correct focus in the struggle against apartheid was an ever-present concern to members of the BCM. In addressing the oppression of women, the crucial point was that the primacy of Black solidarity could be lost. Unlike the tone of much of the secondary literature that characterises the concerns of feminism as being *overlooked* by SASO in its preoccupation with Black solidarity, we have seen that SASO's position was more clearly defined in *distinction* to feminism. The feminist critique problematised the central Black Consciousness ideas of oppression and liberation, which held race to be the key determinate, and was a potentially potent threat to the broad church of Black unity (as was the growing class-based analysis of South African society examined in chapters five and six). And it was a threat to which Black Consciousness activists mounted an intellectual response.

What was particularly undermining about women's liberation was that it could separate black women from 'the people,' and could play into the hands of the state's attempts to co-opt a small black middle class into the limited political horizons of the homelands. A short article that appeared in *SASO Newsletter* in 1975 that looked to settle the question 'What is a liberated woman?' argued strongly that 'the real meaning of this concept for the Black woman must be sought outside the scope of what is commonly known as women's libbers in the white society'. This was because 'women's lib' was perceived as 'the articulation of interests that pertain to one section of the community only, the community of women' and that it ran 'parallel to our political aspirations as a Black Nation'.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Magaziner, 'Pieces of a (Wo)man,' 6 – 7.

⁷¹ 'Building a Nation: Black Women's Power,' *SASO Newsletter*, 5, 2 (July/August 1975), 7-8.

The undesirability of this parallelism of political consciousness was made explicit by the writer, using a favourite piscine phrase of Biko's, when she referred to the question of women's liberation as being 'a rather dangerous red herring thrown across the path of the struggle for real liberation'.⁷² The Black middle class, where the bulk of 'women's lib' activity occurred, had 'fully absorbed white values to an amazing degree'. The writer asserted a core belief of Black Consciousness – Black women had 'to go it alone' because 'the oppressed and the oppressor' could 'never discuss adequately what the political situation is'. While the writer acknowledged that there was a need for self-criticism, and recognised that Black women were 'third grade citizens,' there was a danger and slipperiness in 'evident truth'. As the struggle unfolded and broadened there was 'a more urgent need' to be 'bound by ties of nationalism but much more by common scars and wounds suffered at the hands of White oppression'.⁷³

Black Consciousness and Feminism in South Africa in the 1970s

Within liberal white circles like the Black Sash, NUSAS and sections of the Churches, to which Black Consciousness activists turned pointed criticism, women's liberation had gained greater currency by the early 1970s. This was noted in a special issue on women and the Church in the Christian journal *Pro Veritate*. Editor and executive member of the Christian Institute, Bruckner de Villiers, played on an oft-quoted saying of Jesus⁷⁴ when he commented in his editorial, 'women who, like the poor, have always been and will always be with us have in recent times become News [sic] in a very big way. They form, in our day, a topic of such actuality that a journal like ours can hardly afford to ignore them'.⁷⁵

In the same issue, Shirley Moore and Sheila Morton pointed out the congruence between women's liberation and Black liberation. 'We in South Africa who are aware of oppression tend to be far more aware of the need for black/white liberation rather than male/female liberation and are hardly aware of the links between. American women have stated quite categorically that until they (the women) become identified with the Blacks there shall be no liberation!!' To this observation they added, 'In South Africa, if white women are

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Cf. Matt 26: 11, 'The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.' And also John 12: 8, 'You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me'. (New International Version, 1984).

⁷⁵ W.B. De Villiers, 'Women and the Church,' *Pro Veritate*, 10, 5 (September 1971), 1.

becoming aware of a male oppressive society, how much more aware must the Black woman become to bring about her liberation? Far be it from us to speak of the Black woman's plight – it is part of her liberation to speak for herself.⁷⁶ Their article emphasised the charged debate around what constituted the struggle for liberation and what constituted personal freedom. These were questions which Black Consciousness activists had posed their own answers to, and the similarities in the struggle for 'male/female' and 'black/white liberation' were potentially undermining. Black Consciousness leaders maintained a prescriptive vision of the liberated black subject, and the clamour for male/female liberation confused the analytical basis for political mobilisation.

The *Pro Veritate* article also ignored the fundamentally different positions of black and white women in relation to the state. Cherryl Walker observes that in South Africa 'white women could, for the most part, look to the white state for the protection of their interests and for reforms in areas where they still felt themselves to be discriminated against as women,' whereas for black women, 'reforms in their subordinate status as women required radical changes in the very nature of the state itself.'⁷⁷ This was a reason that political organisation among black women developed in line with the national liberation struggle rather than developing a distinct and separate feminist politics. It was the white supremacist state, rather than patriarchy as an entrenched system, that represented the main instrument of oppression for black women, and the assumption was that with its removal focus could then shift to address patriarchy and women's rights.

White and black women thus stood in a very different relationship to each other in South Africa, which the North American feminism Moore and Morton referred to, did not account for. This did not prevent white liberals from drawing attention, most frustratingly from SASO's viewpoint for its paternalism, to the particular plight of African women. On 18 February 1971 the outspoken critic of apartheid and Progressive Party M.P. for the Johannesburg constituency of Houghton, Helen Suzman, presented a 'Charter for Women' to the South African parliament on behalf of the Black Sash.⁷⁸ Jean Sinclair, the president of the Black Sash, had overseen the drawing up of the Charter in consultation with a professor of Constitutional Law and had circulated the document to a wide range of organisations and

⁷⁶ S. Moore, S. Morton, 'Women's Liberation in South Africa,' *Pro Veritate*, 10, 5 (September 1971), 5.

⁷⁷ C. Walker, *Women and Resistance in South Africa* (London: Onyx Press, 1982), 151.

⁷⁸ J. Sinclair, 'Letter from the Black Sash,' *Pro Veritate*, 10, 5 (September 1971), 14.

women's organisations in particular, with a request that they formally adopt the Charter.⁷⁹ The document was a statement of rights which appeared 'to be so fundamental as not to need stating at all'.⁸⁰ They included the freedom to live with one's spouse of choice, access to free education, freedom of residence and movement, and the right to own and rent property. Apartheid denied African women even these most basic of human privileges. Sinclair was of the opinion that 'there can be no woman who will not support [the Charter's] nine clauses' and it followed that apartheid violated the fundamental human rights of African women.⁸¹ The intention of the charter and the Black Sash campaign was to 'ameliorate the plight of African women'.⁸² But the campaign and the charter also resonated with the changing awareness of 'the actuality' of women's struggles, as De Villiers had clumsily put it.

Even the Christian Institute had been pointed out for critique as a male-dominated organisation by a group of women, meeting at the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre outside Johannesburg in August 1971. The women met as part of the centre's Personal Relations and Organizational Development programmes (PROD), for which Turfloop student leader Daphne Masekela was a consultant. Joan O'Leary, the co-director of the programme mentioned that the group included 'Jews, Christians, agnostics and atheists, nuns, ex-nuns and radical young students from the Women's Lib. movement'.⁸³ O'Leary's report on the workshop mentioned that it had been an introduction for many of the women involved, and acknowledged that much groundwork still needed to be done. She ended with a curious comparison that signalled much of the danger Black Consciousness activists sensed in feminism. O'Leary described the 'exhilarating experience' of meeting as women and commented that 'there was something of the joy and freedom among the women that is perhaps also felt by black power groups when they meet together'.⁸⁴

Here the carefully developed Black Consciousness formulation of exactly who constituted 'Black,' as those people of colour who were historically oppressed, was threatened with a potential diversion: a solidarity that shifted the prime identification from race to gender. By her comparison O'Leary indicated that Black Consciousness's

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ 'Charter for Women,' *Pro Veritate*, 10, 5 (September 1971), 7.

⁸¹ Sinclair, 'Letter from the Blacks Sash,' 14.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ J. O'Leary, 'On Being a Person,' *Pro Veritate*, 10, 6 (October 1971), 8.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

‘prefigurative politics,’ to use Hali’s phrase, which had apotheosised the Black man, could be qualified and challenged from an independent intellectual standpoint. The monopoly on freedom that Black Consciousness activists argued was the sole preserve of the authentically ‘Black man’ who had given himself/herself wholly to the struggle, could also be prefigured by women who used their common sex as the basis for their solidarity and societal critique. Whether this was an appropriate response to a highly unique form of oppression was another matter.

Black Consciousness and Black Feminism

As the above discussion has indicated, there is a tension to the legacy and impact of Black Consciousness on the framing of South African gender identities. The discourse appeared both conservative, following a pattern that emerged in other nationalist struggles in Africa, but also held elements of individual empowerment, which could be appropriated by men and women. In a 1994 interview, trade union leader and founder of the Catering and Commercial Allied Workers’ Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA), Emma Mashinini, acknowledged her indebtedness to Black Consciousness. ‘I think Black Consciousness made us,’ she later reflected. It meant ‘Black man, black person, black woman, wake up, stand up for yourselves, and know who you are’.⁸⁵ Here Mashinini easily equated the ‘man’ of Black Consciousness with the generic ‘human’ or ‘woman’. Another prominent black woman activist, Ellen Kuzwayo, who was active in the 1970s with the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) and, as noted above, was a mentor to activist Deborah Matshoba,⁸⁶ mirrored this sentiment. In her autobiography Kuzwayo recounts giving testimony in a court in the 1980s where she strongly defended the credentials of Black Consciousness. She told the court ‘I believe in Black Consciousness’ and described it as ‘an institution’ and ‘a process whereby blacks in South Africa were beginning to take a serious look at themselves’.⁸⁷

The grassroots community and welfare organisations, like the YWCA, that Kuzwayo played a leading role in, lent themselves to a more egalitarian, less prescriptive discourse on

⁸⁵ G. Davis, ‘I Speak as a Woman Person: Geoffrey Davis Interviews Emma Mashinini,’ *Kunapipi*, 16, 1 (1994), 580 – 581. See also E. Mashinini, *Strikes have followed me all my life* (London: The Women’s Press, 1989; New York: Routledge, 1991).

⁸⁶ Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives!*, 280.

⁸⁷ E. Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman* (London: The Women’s Press, 1985), 226–227. Kuzwayo relates an occurrence after her testimony in court, when the father of one of the accused hugged her and said ‘You are not an ordinary woman, you pleaded like a man, only a man could speak the way you did’. *Ibid.*

the role of women in society. At a gathering of twenty-six African cultural organisations at the Ecumenical Lay Training Centre at Edendale, outside of Pietermaritzburg, in mid-August 1971, Kuzwayo shared the platform with Steve Biko and Chief Gatsha Buthelezi among others, and spoke on 'The Role of Women in the New Society'.⁸⁸ SASO had worked hard to initiate the conference along with ASSECA and IDAMASA, and the conference was the first step towards the founding conference of the Black People's Convention in Johannesburg in December 1971. The *SASO Newsletter* that covered the conference, employed the term 'the women folk' again, and commented that Kuzwayo's paper had made a strong impact, as it brought the 'Self assertion by the women folk onto the mainstream of the strategy building'.⁸⁹ Kuzwayo's paper prioritised 'self assertion' by women in a national context, distinctly with the political goal of the 'new society' that SASO, ASSECA and IDAMASA were working towards. It was to be a new society in which women had a voice and in which they asserted their rights.

Biko's paper to the conference did not comment explicitly on the role of women in what Biko called 'modern African culture,' but the premise of his argument was that 'One of the most fundamental aspects of our culture is the importance we attach to *man*. Ours has always been a *man-centred* society'.⁹⁰ Whereas the tone of the remainder of the paper softened the jarringly sexist impact of Biko's assertion, the question remains why he had not defined the nub of African culture as being 'people-centred' or 'human-centred'. As the discussion of Biko's own limitations has emphasised, this was in keeping with some of the conservative values he still maintained in his personal life. Kuzwayo's paper had balanced the gender emphasis at the Edendale conference, but it was an intervention that she needed to make nonetheless, and would need to be made in the 'new society' through the 'self assertion of the women folk'. Although Kuzwayo presented a strong defence of Black Consciousness in her court testimony, she needed to take a strong stand for 'the self assertion of women' when she shared the platform with Biko.

Dorothy Driver's analysis of Kuzwayo's autobiography has similarly drawn attention to her narrative attempt to mediate Black Consciousness's prescriptive discourse.⁹¹ Kuzwayo's life's story indeed makes interesting comparison with Ramphela's, who

⁸⁸ *SASO Newsletter*, 1, 4 (September 1971), 4.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ S. Biko, 'Some African Cultural Concepts,' in *I Write*, 45. Emphasis added.

⁹¹ Driver, 'Women as Mothers, Women as Writers'.

emphasises how black women who were respected in SASO were required to be self-assertive, bordering on outright aggression when the situation demanded it.⁹² On the one hand, Kuzwayo's book has been read as a powerful triumph of 'wholeness attained by the transitional woman'. Kuzwayo 'is not Westernized; she is one of those who have Africanised the Western concept of woman and in herself achieved a synthesis with meaning for all who experience cultural conflict'.⁹³ Kuzwayo's experience of cultural conflict extended to her choice to identify herself as a 'woman' rather than a 'mother' in her title, indicating that not all black women were content to be defined solely in terms of their 'structural' role as mothers. Driver notes, '[t]hat the term "woman" is used rather than "mother" suggests that some space is being claimed for the voices of women beyond the careful definitions of the mother in the discourse of Black Consciousness'.⁹⁴

If Black Consciousness needed to be mediated and selectively appropriated there was still the danger in going too far in self-assertion, as it could be associated with an 'individualistic' Western feminism that divorced individual rights from the greater struggle of the people. This was a wider tension that also structured the response of ANC activists to feminism. Gloria Mtungwa's short poem 'Militant Beauty' juxtaposed 'Distorted women's lib/refusing to mother kids/and provide family comfort/harassing a tired enslaved dad' with the militant beauty of the woman for whom 'luxurious apartments and flashy cars/have never been their aspiration' but rather 'Flowering in natural beauty/through progressive ideology/...overcame imposed passivity/and became essence [sic] of militancy'.⁹⁵

For Black Consciousness activists, it was the blurry congruency between the identity politics of feminism and Black Consciousness that was part of the threat feminism posed. The search for a reconstructed self that black activists advocated bore close parallels to the feminist project, as both 'Feminism and Black Consciousness... felt the need for a community which will not continually make them "other" allowing them to speak without the constraint of patriarchy on one hand, and "white domination, on the other"'.⁹⁶ It was partly this uncomfortable resonance that made feminism a dangerous diversion. Indeed it was

⁹² Ramphele, *Across Boundaries*; and Ramphele, 'Dynamics of Gender,' 219-20.

⁹³ N. Gordimer, 'Preface' in Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman*, xi. Again there is a similarity with Ramphele, who in the last chapters of her memoir, 'Forging an Independent Lifestyle' and 'Stretching Across Boundaries,' describes her personal journey to a sense of wholeness.

⁹⁴ Driver, 'Women as Mothers, Women as Writers,' 238-9.

⁹⁵ *Sechaba*, 12 (1978), 64.

⁹⁶ Driver, 'Women as Mothers, Women as Writers,' 232.

constitutive of the discourse to ‘eclipse the female’ with a rhetorical ‘emphasis on black experience and black perspective’.⁹⁷

Conclusions

In the course of the 1970s government repression did much to loosen and change the gender dynamics within SASO. Biko was particularly impressed by the courage of Thenjiwe Mtintso, who at that stage was working as a reporter for Donald Woods’s *Daily Dispatch* and was tortured by the Special Branch. Lindy Wilson suggests it was only a matter of time before Biko would have had to acknowledge ‘the existence of sexism as a destructive ‘ism’.⁹⁸ After his banning in 1973, Biko was also increasingly reliant on Ramphela as a ‘sounding-board in his political thinking’ in King William’s Town and was confronted by her position as a professional doctor with a secure income.⁹⁹ Due to Biko’s own restrictions, as well as due to the impetus of the Black Community Programmes started under the auspices of the second phase of Spro-cas, community development projects became more prominent, with women taking leading roles such as at Zanempilo.

The chapter has argued that the issue of sexism did have political currency in SASO circles. Female student activists looked to role models like Angela Davis and were encouraged to adopt a tough femininity which led them to be hostile toward the women who were on the periphery of the movement as so-called ‘gumba material’. Lindy Wilson’s portrayal of Biko’s political philosophy as analytically deficient because of his lack of awareness of sexism, does not match this historical record. It appears instead that feminism was deliberately muted by SASO and that sexism was purposely relegated to secondary importance as racism and exploitation was the focus. SASO viewed the ‘woman’s question’ as a ‘Western discourse’ which resonated discordantly with Black Consciousness’s identity politics.

The reasons for the SASO leaders’ rejection of sexism matched their early tension with Marxism and class analysis. Indicating a deeper tension between nationalism and critical theory, Andrea Pető writes of former Communist bloc countries, that efforts towards building national consciousness have tended to discredit the leftist critical project of viewing

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Wilson, ‘Steve Biko: A Life,’ 60-1.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

social values as constructed rather than handed down ready-made.¹⁰⁰ The SASO activists' rejection of feminism as 'Western' and 'imperialistic' and its rhetorical embrace of traditional gender roles, indicate that Black Consciousness was forced to set the limits of its critical intellectualism to serve the liberation of the 'Black Nation' in South Africa. The search for a free and open humanity that lay at the centre of Biko's attempt to reconceptualise the terrain of South African politics chose to overlook that the link between the personal and the political was more than racial self-awareness, but class and gender determined as well. While the discourse that Biko, Pityana and the SASO student leaders constructed overlooked this, it was left to women themselves within the BCM to take the initiative and to appropriate SASO's 'liberated man' for themselves.

¹⁰⁰ A. Pető, 'From Visibility to Analyses: Gender and History,' in C. Salvaterra, B. Waaldijk (eds.), *Paths to Gender: European Historical Perspectives on Women and Men* (Pisa: Plus University of Pisa Press, 2009), 1-10.

The University Christian Movement, Black Theology and Black Consciousness, 1967 - 1972

Black Consciousness demands of the black man to come into a new relationship with whites. This relationship must be based on love and mutual respect...*This is where many people mistakenly think Black Consciousness is another form of separation. Black Consciousness advocates unity. It seeks to reconcile man to God and man to man, the black man to the white man.* To speak of unity is to make certain demands on the black man. The first for me is to be a man. Therefore unity is a man uniting with another man, a unity of equals. This is very difficult for the black man. It is even more difficult for the white man. Terms like unity, integration only begin to assume some meaning when man is speaking to man.

– Ernest Baartman, 1973¹

The idea of freedom, so powerfully constitutive of the discourses of Black Consciousness and feminism, was also a key determinant in the theological revaluations well advanced by the late 1960s. Whereas the ecumenical movement was significant, also of vital importance was the push for a greater contextual understanding of scripture and faith, most powerfully represented by the liberation theology of South American radical clerics and Black Theology from Black America. Liberation indeed was a watchword shared by the two theological currents and theologians were faithful to the spirit of their age, which strove to formulate a faith that was ‘relevant’ to ‘Third World’ struggles for democracy. This chapter presents both a historical and theoretical interpretation of Black Consciousness ideas and seeks to explore their breadth and wider resonance in South Africa’s church structures. It forms a prologue to the following chapter, which focuses on the institutional matrices where the BCM operated and in which many of its members moved. Theological debate proved to be another way in which a dialogue with international ideas emerged and impinged on individuals in the nascent BCM.² The seminaries were also protected spaces that were receptive to Black Consciousness ideas.

¹ E. Baartman, ‘Black Consciousness,’ *Pro Veritate*, 11, 11 (March 1973), 6.

² Eugene Klaaren observes that Black Theology became South Africa’s best theological export, attracting a wealth of international study in the late 1980s in comparison to the neglect of Afrikaans theology. E.M. Klaaren, ‘Creation and Apartheid: South African Theology since 1948,’ in Elphick and Davenport, *Christianity in South Africa*, 370 - 382. Albert

The chapter will examine more closely moments of intense contestation, seeking to situate debates within their institutional contexts and the individuals involved. The appearance of Black Consciousness helped to push through changes wider than the initial concerns of black students and student politics to address alienation and dehumanisation within Church and society in South Africa. The reception of Black Consciousness amongst older black clergymen on the one hand, and by some white liberal Christians on the other, was facilitated by discontent and social awareness among black Christians, and in the case of the established Churches, by a shift in global theological emphasis, linked to a changing understanding of the role of the Church in the world and the implications of the concept of *oikoumenē*. The WCC decision to fund southern African liberation movements under its Programme to Combat Racism marked a crisis point around which theological and political debate within the churches focused in the early 1970s. The chapter will argue that under this broader institutional context, the focus of the Black Consciousness and Black Theology critique were mobilised initially around localised and immediate sources of discontent, and were later broadened out to address the wider issues of the need for political and social change.

Interpreting Black Consciousness

As a body of ideas that was developed in a national, South African context, Black Consciousness resonated with nationalisms that had preceded it. This was a valuable access point for those who sought to understand and sympathise with the new discourse. Messages of support for Black Consciousness were forthcoming from surprising sources. Dr. Kobus Kruger, a lecturer at the University of South Africa and a clergyman of the Dutch Reformed Church, interpreted Black Consciousness as a major progressive step in South Africa's political and cultural history. In a review article published in January 1973 that discussed the Spro-cas Black Community Programmes report *Black Viewpoint* (1972) edited by Biko, Kruger appreciated that '[i]n South Africa the day has come when the black man has discovered himself'. 'Now we are embarking on a new stage in our political, cultural and church history' he reflected. The significance of this new stage in the country's history was that the initiative of deciding on South Africa's future had shifted. Rather in the future 'our

Nolan's theology is a notable exception, particularly his *Jesus Before Christianity*, published by David Philip in 1976, which became an international bestseller.

co-existence in this country will progressively be the co-existence of equal partners in thinking and doing'. In fact, Kruger argued that in contrast to the staid political debate in white circles, 'the initiative as far as thinking about the future of South Africa is concerned, has been grasped by the new generation of black intellectuals'.³ There were ready parallels to be drawn with the Afrikaner nationalist struggle and Kruger went so far as to pose the rhetorical question, 'Can we not say that, *mutatis mutandis*, men like S.J. du Toit and J.B.M. Hertzog worked from a "black" viewpoint?' and to equate the feeling among black intellectuals with the ferment amongst Afrikaners in 1938.⁴ Kruger's thoughts offered an example of the way in which Black Consciousness could be sympathetically and intelligently interpreted from an ostensibly antagonistic quarter of South African society.

Kruger cautiously welcomed the new discourse, which he regarded as 'a normal, healthy outlet,' arguing that Black Consciousness was in fact a '*contra-nationalism*, begotten by white group-egoism'.⁵ However, he warned that all nationalisms were 'Janus-faced' as nationalism united people while it simultaneously excluded others. Black Consciousness posed this danger and its proponents particularly threatened to twist Christianity once more 'into the handmaiden of culture'. He concluded that if properly 'guided and controlled' Black Consciousness could 'surely be a source of tremendous constructive energy in South Africa'. Kruger made no mention of separate development and the apartheid state's attempt to create proto-nationalisms rooted in anthropologically-defined tribal or ethnic identities. His review of *Black Viewpoint* instead assumed the discussion of a *South African* nationalism, indicated by his closing reference to 'South Africa' and his identification of Black Consciousness with early Afrikaner nationalism. His opening sentence, indeed, argued that the emergence of Black Consciousness indicated a new stage had been reached in '*our* political, cultural and church history'.⁶ Whereas there was no explicit refutation of the apartheid vision, such a refutation was implicit in his analysis.

The ideals of the Christian message of love for God and neighbour contrasted starkly with the repressive reality of apartheid, and threw up ready parallels for the members of the Christian Institute to other moments in the history of Western civilisation where the individual conscience was pitted against coercive power, whether bureaucratic, traditional or

³ K. Kruger, 'A "White" Reaction to "Black Viewpoint"', *Pro Veritate*, 11, 9 (January 1973), 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶ Emphasis mine.

overtly repressive and totalitarian. The names of Luther, Calvin and Bonhoeffer were often evoked and their thinking on the Church-State relationship examined in close detail in the pages of the ecumenical journal *Pro Veritate*. The ‘church struggle’ in South Africa was conceptualised against a larger historical backdrop. This was summed up in the appeal to a theology of crisis, a ‘*status confessionis*,’ that was marked by the SACC renaming their periodical *Kairos*, and alluded to ‘a moment of truth in which the Gospel itself was understood to be at stake’.⁷ The 1960s marked an intensification of the crisis of Christian conscience in South Africa leading by the 1970s to direct confrontation with the state and fulminations from Prime Minister B.J. Vorster that ‘the cloth’ would not protect those who defied apartheid.

Black Theology, the University Christian Movement and the Church

Black Theology developed as a response to the emergence of Black Consciousness and the reality for the need for Black liberation. It developed first in the United States and then in South Africa with a notable interchange of ideas and resources between the two countries. As formulated by James Cone, ‘the purpose of Black Theology is to place the actions of black people toward liberation in the Christian perspective, showing that Christ himself is participating in the black struggle for freedom’.⁸ Christ and Christianity were therefore *for* the oppressed and the role of the Black Church was to ‘focus on black liberation as the sole reason for its existence’.⁹ In his 1972 paper ‘What is Black Consciousness?’ Pityana argued that the relationship between Black Consciousness and Black Theology was that ‘one is a genus of the other’ implying a direct, one-way causality.¹⁰ This chapter explores this relationship and suggests rather that Black Consciousness and Black Theology were two bodies of ideas that developed symbiotically, with marked influence one on the other. In institutional terms Black Theology was a crucial branch of the overall proliferation of Black Consciousness thinking in South Africa. Black Theology in South Africa has been traced officially to 1968, when Basil Moore published the essay ‘Towards Black Theology’ after his

⁷ P. Walshe, ‘Christianity and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle: The Prophetic Voice within Divided Churches,’ in Elphick and Davenport, *Christianity in South Africa*, 388.

⁸ J.H. Cone, ‘Black Consciousness and the Black Church: A Historical-Theological Interpretation,’ *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 387, The Sixties: Radical Change in American Religion (Jan. 1970), 53.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

¹⁰ N. Pityana, ‘What is Black Consciousness?’, in B. Moore (ed.), *Black Theology: the South African Voice* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1973), 63.

return from the United States. Moore had attended the annual American University Christian Movement conference in Cleveland in December 1967.¹¹

Moore's visit to the United States, and the recognition of the challenge of the new wave of Black Consciousness-inspired thinking, led the University Christian Movement to initiate a Black Theology Project under the leadership of Fedsem student Sabelo Stanley Ntwasa. Moore's visit to the United States was also important for securing funds for the South African UCM, allowing the organisation to hire a full-time secretary and purchase a car. The WSCF stepped in to provide financial assistance and by September 1969 87 per cent of the UCM's budget was sourced from overseas donors.¹² The UCM circulated Moore's essay extensively around the country and it provided the initial stimulus for seminar discussion and debate. Moore later defined Black Theology in the 1970s as 'black people interpreting the Gospel in the light of black experience and interpreting the black experience in the light of the Gospel'. Similar to the Black Consciousness proviso that not all oppressed were necessarily black, Moore asserted that Black Theology was the exclusive preserve of those who actively engaged in resistance to apartheid; 'black theology had to grow out of the liberation struggle and its subjects were the liberation activists'.¹³ As Moore first wrote in 1968, Black Theology was '*a theology of the oppressed, by the oppressed, for the liberation of the oppressed*'.¹⁴

At the same time, Black American theologians became directly involved in the South African struggle. James Cone, rather than being 'merely a distant intellectual stimulus', made the effort to establish contact with black South African theologians, 'contributing papers to their symposia and commenting on their work'.¹⁵ Although black clergymen played an important role as agents disseminating Black Theology in their own right, the emphasis on the importance of Black Theology was part of a multifaceted strategy by SASO to re-orientate the thinking of black South Africans away from an inward and moralistic

¹¹ B. Pityana, 'Black Theology,' in J. De Gruchy and C. Villa-Vicencio (eds.), *Doing Theology in Context: South African Perspectives* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1994), 173. D. Magaziner, 'Christ in Context: Developing a Political Faith in Apartheid South Africa,' *Radical History Review*, 99 (Fall 2007), 96-7.

¹² Karis and Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence*, 74.

¹³ B. Moore, 'Black Theology: In the Beginning,' *Journal for the Study of Religion*, 4, 2 (1991). Cited in B. Moore, 'Black Theology Revisited,' *Bulletin for Contextual Theology* 1 (1994). Found at www.sorat.ukzn.ac.za/theology/bct/moore.htm (accessed on 05 May 2009).

¹⁴ Moore, *Black Theology: the South African Voice*, ix.

¹⁵ G.M. Fredrickson, 'Black Power in the United States and Black Consciousness in South Africa: Connections and Comparisons,' in R. Greenstein (ed.) *Comparative Perspectives on South Africa* (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's, 1998), 199.

otherworldly theology, to a contextual faith expressed so well in Biko's address 'The Church as seen by a Young Layman'. It was part of a strategy that complemented the community development projects and aimed to engender a greater independence of thinking and action, leveraging control from the white-dominated hierarchy of the established churches. In this contestation the place of Scripture, the nature of the Church and the figure of Christ were all open to reappraisal in the light of lived black experience.

The 1968 UCM conference in the small town of Stutterheim in the Eastern Cape had provided Biko and Pityana with the initial opportunity to assemble a caucus of black student leaders. The purpose was to discuss the formation of a separate black student organisation that would address the particular concerns of black students. There was much immediate need for the initiation of the new organisation. Black students were scattered among the handful of Bantu Education created 'bush' universities and communication between the students of different universities was fraught with obstacles. Hence the immediate concern of SASO after its official launch in 1969 at the University of the North was with the facilitation of communication among black centres. SASO formation schools devoted much attention to various communication models to optimise their resources. The UCM also provided valuable financial assistance and contacts whereby SASO leaders could engage in activities they would otherwise not have been able to do. Although Colin Collins later reflected, 'Black polarisation would have taken place sooner or later had the UCM not existed... The UCM was the right organisation in the right place at the right time. It made itself available to the Movement. No more, no less'.¹⁶

As an organisation the UCM exemplified ecumenism. In his annual report to the organisation in Johannesburg in 1969, in a tone that mirrored Visser 't Hooft's statement, *Christians for the Future*, church minister and UCM Director of Social Concerns, James Polley, characterised the UCM as 'a community of hope – a community of men and women who radically anticipate the future by doing something positive about the present. This is the essence of our Christian commitment. We stand beyond the Exodus and the Resurrection as the community who live for the future in which new life, new institutions, new structures will be born'.¹⁷ It was the Christian hope that related a hoped-for future to an unjust present reality that was the UCM's most powerful resource. Over the two years following its

¹⁶ Collins, 'Birth of the Black Consciousness Movement,' 30.

¹⁷ Annual report of the Department of Social Concerns of the UCM, Johannesburg, 1969, in Karis and Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence*, 422.

establishment in 1967 the UCM grew quickly and it established 30 branches on campuses around the country. By the time of the second UCM national conference in July 1968, already 60 per cent of its membership was black.¹⁸

In 1971 the UCM organised a series of conferences on Black Theology at the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre, the Edendale Ecumenical Centre, the Federal Theological Seminary, Alice, St. Peter's Seminary at Hammanskraal, and in centres in Zululand and the Transkei.¹⁹ The collection of papers presented at these conferences formed the basis of the book *Black Theology: The South African Voice*, edited by Basil Moore and published in London in 1973.²⁰ The UCM's own experimentation with alternative worship practices and search for a 'relevant' Christianity ran together in complex ways with the intellectual labour of the new group of black theologians who increasingly rejected any form of white interference, indeed '[r]elevant was the UCM's watchword'.²¹ Whereas in the ultimate logic of secular theology, leaders of the UCM such as Basil Moore and Colin Collins moved increasingly away from the established Church (Collins eventually left the priesthood), black theologians undertook a similar revaluation of faith, although they disagreed where secularisation substituted Faith with 'consciousness' and replaced theism with existentialism.²² The ferment of criticism and revaluation of theology so much a part of the UCM was appropriated by the participants of the Black Theology Project to reconfigure what black faith in God meant in political terms in South Africa, opening 'new possibilities for articulating what it meant to be Christian'.²³

Following the lead of the members of the Black Theology project, black political activists began to conceptualise faith politically and saw their commitment to Christ as synonymous with their commitment to the Struggle. The assassination of the past Turfloop SRC president and SASO activist, Abraham Tiro, by a parcel-bomb in Gabarone in 1973, came to function as a powerful motif for political martyrdom, and compared with Christ's own death.²⁴ After being expelled, Tiro had taken up work as a history teacher at the Morris Isaacson School in Soweto, renowned for the later role its students played in the Soweto

¹⁸ Karis and Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence*, 73.

¹⁹ Moore, *Black Theology: the South African Voice*, vii.

²⁰ The collection was published a year later in the United States as *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1974).

²¹ Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 70. Emphasis in the original.

²² This shift is discussed in detail in Magaziner, *cit.*

²³ *Ibid.*, 77.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

Uprising of June 1976, before fleeing South Africa for Botswana. The poem 'Casualties' by Roni Karolen, circulated in 1974 by the Johannesburg People's Experimental Theatre, articulated the synthesis powerfully: 'Blessed are the Jews who lived with Jesus / Blessed are the Blacks who shared with Tiro / Sacred are all those who keep up with struggle / Of the son of David and the son of Azania'.²⁵

Black students in South Africa appropriated and transformed the secular theology of the 1960s in powerful ways. The proliferation of an international movement, which welcomed the secularisation of belief and realised Bonhoeffer's invocation of 'a world come of age,' was coupled in South Africa with a new attempt to make Christianity speak to racial inequality and oppression. Through its seminars and conferences the UCM introduced ideas that sought to contribute to a revaluation of Christ's place in the world and to combat the 'pragmatic piety' identified by the Spro-cas Church commission, which was the predominant mindset of a majority of the Churches and Christian students. In this theological shift, the UCM was helped by its links with the WSCF. At the UCM conference 'Happening '69' General Secretary, Basil Moore, reported on the WSCF Committee meeting held in Otaniemi, Finland in August the previous year. What struck him as 'one of the most clear over-all impressions was that the WSCF stands against oppression in the world of to-day. It is particularly opposed to the kind of political oppression found in the Third World when it is based upon a rich-poor suppression'.²⁶ Moore and the UCM were also made acutely aware of the position they occupied in South Africa, a country that was a powerful example of such oppression.

Identifying themselves with the wider experience of exploitation in the developing nations was a further facet in the developing Black Consciousness critique of apartheid. Biko had referred to 'the common experience of the Third World people' when Gerhart asked him about the intellectual origins of Black Consciousness.²⁷ Whereas the starting point was personal 'experience' and one's 'analysis of the situation as one sees it,' wider reading, ironically from the 'small insights' provided by 'the conservative press' on developments in Africa, Asia, Latin America and 'particularly China,' created 'a focus for identification'.²⁸ In

²⁵ Cited in Magaziner, 'Christ in Context,' 80. Also see discussion in *Law and the Prophets*, 58-9.

²⁶ University of Witwatersrand Historical Papers (hereafter WHP) A2675 Karis/Gerhart Collection, Folder 927 University Christian Movement 1969, UCM Happening '69 Report of the General Secretary, Annexure 6.

²⁷ Gerhart, 'Interview with Steve Biko,' in Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives!*, 24.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 24-5.

the 1960s theorists of underdevelopment, like West Indian scholar and activist Walter Rodney, argued that the so-called 'First World' – 'Third World' divide was posited on the enrichment of the 'First' at the expense of the 'Third;' the orthodox position that viewed a dynamic, advanced world, assisting the backward poor world was ahistorical, as it ignored the role of colonialism and empire that had created the division. The South African state's later attempts to reform apartheid after the 1983 Tricameral Parliament, used the argument that South Africa was 'a combination' of the 'First World' and 'Third World' as a refined version of the apartheid logic of cultural relativism, as the argument presumed a timeless backwardness in African society and glorified the supposed hard-won achievements of white South Africa.²⁹

Black members of the UCM and the participants of the Black Theology Project took the lead from the UCM but broke with secularism to forge a new 'political faith'.³⁰ The reinterpretation of the significance of the human struggle against oppression was linked closely to a secularised understanding of scripture and Christ's mission, and provided activists with the grounds for aligning God's Will with the Struggle, opening resources of spiritual sustenance that were to prove crucial in the face of growing state repression. Many who came to the new understanding of the relationship between personal faith and public duty described it as a 'conversion'. Student activist and later General Secretary of the SACC, Frank Chikane, described his exposure to Black Consciousness and Black Theology as 'a conversion experience' which 'unleashed in me energies and commitments I never knew were there. It enabled me to engage in political action as a Christian... It brought me into the struggle'.³¹ Shorn of the destabilising influence of inherited patterns of thinking, which regarded 'politics' as inimical to Christian piety, Christian activists were thus freed to engage in the national struggle in a way they had previously thought not possible.

The development of Black Theology also provided a language of protest for Black clergy to express long-held frustrations with their churches. As George Mukuka notes of the Black Catholic clergy, they 'started questioning the hierarchy of their own church long before Black Consciousness was formally launched in South Africa in the late 1960s. With the

²⁹ J. Sharp, 'Two worlds in one country: "First World" and "Third World" in South Africa,' in E. Boonzaier, J. Sharp (eds.), *South African Keywords: The Uses and Abuses of Political Concepts* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1988), 111-21. For more on the permutations of 'ethnicity' and its complex relationship to race, see S. Dubow, 'Ethnic Euphemisms and Racial Echoes,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20, 3 (Sep. 1994), 355-370.

³⁰ The term 'political faith' is Magaziner's.

³¹ Interview, F. Chikane to B. Moore, cited in Moore, 'Black Theology Revisited'.

launching of the Black Consciousness Movement... from 1969 onwards Black Catholic priests adhered to it *mutatis mutandis*.³² Mukuka goes on to note that the seminary at St. Peter's, Hammanskraal, 40km north of Pretoria, played a 'vital role,' both for the Catholic Church and for the response to Black Consciousness, particularly with the formation of St. Peter's Old Boys Association (SPOBA) in 1966, which saw Black priests take a much stronger critical stand.³³ It was the impact of Black Consciousness that enabled Black priests to 'question authority and try to enforce change'. In their challenge to authority structures at the college the lecturers at St. Peter's, particularly Oswin Magrath who had been rector of the college from 1957,³⁴ played a significant role as well as individuals such as Lebamang Sebidi, Buti Tlhagale, Elias Monyai and Ernst Baartman.³⁵

The black seminaries provided a protected space for discussion and dialogue. Of particular importance was the Federal Theological Seminary (Fedsem), based at Alice near the University of Fort Hare. The seminary had been established in 1963 in response to the pressure of apartheid, as an interdenominational seminary on land belonging to the Church of Scotland. The Church of the Province of South Africa (Anglican), the Methodist Church, the United Congregational Church and some of the Presbyterian churches were involved in its founding.³⁶ From its inception the Federal Theological Seminary was highly politicised and caused the government substantial alarm. In November 1974 the state moved to expropriate the land on which Fedsem was based on the pretext that it was required by the neighbouring Fort Hare University.³⁷ The seminary relocated to Edendale outside Pietermaritzburg, a move which Durban trade union activist and academic, Gerhard Maré, suggested was indicative of the significance that Durban had acquired over the years from 1970 to 1974 (see chapter 6).³⁸

In 1962, the year before the establishment of Fedsem, the Anglican Seminary of St. Peter's had been forced to relocate from Rosettenville outside Johannesburg to Alice as

³² G.S. Mukuka, 'The Impact of Black Consciousness on the black Catholic clergy and their training from 1965 – 1981,' (M.A. thesis, University of Natal, 1996), 10-11. For his recent book, see also G.S. Mukuka, *The Other Side of the Story: The Silent Experience of the Black Clergy in the Catholic Church in South Africa (1898-1976)* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2008).

³³ See also discussion in Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 80-99.

³⁴ Denis, *The Dominican Friars in Southern Africa*, 219.

³⁵ Mukuka, 'The Impact of Black Consciousness on the black Catholic clergy,' 10-11.

³⁶ P. Denis, 'Seminary Networks and Black Consciousness in South Africa in the 1970s,' *South African Historical Journal*, 62, 1 (2010), 165.

³⁷ *Ibid*; and also Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, 294.

³⁸ Gerhard Maré, interview with author, Durban, 13 August 2008.

well. Denis remarks that the seminaries were ‘*de facto* if not *de jure*, segregated’.³⁹ Black, coloured and Indian seminarians of the ‘English speaking’ Churches were sent to Fedsem while Europeans were sent to Rhodes University, Grahamstown, and white Anglican candidates were sent to St. Paul’s College. The Catholic Church also had a seminary for whites at St. John Vianney, Pretoria, whereas St. Peter’s, Hammanskraal, was for the training of black students. In 1962 the Lutheran Church founded a seminary for black students at the Lutheran Theological College at Umphumulo, Natal.⁴⁰

The black seminaries were particularly receptive to the discourse developed by Biko and his compatriots. The reasons for this, as Denis sees it, were firstly the segregation of clergy training, which fuelled resentment among black candidates. Secondly, the young age of black seminary students made them more disposed to the idealism of the new student movement.⁴¹ Denis attributes central significance to the seminaries for the overall proliferation of Black Consciousness in South Africa. The seminaries functioned as a complementary movement taking the lead from Biko, Pityana and their compatriots and developing the implications of a Black Theology for South Africa. As Makuka indicates, the discourse provided seminary students with a language of protest adapted to address their particular concerns, while providing a means simultaneously of being linked into the broader national struggle. The shift that Black Christians made required a revaluation of the historical role of the Church and the Christian faith in the South African context, as well as a new understanding of the nature of Christ. It was for this reason that Biko and the black theologians moved to offer a thoroughgoing critique of both the Christian faith and the Church.

Biko on Christianity and the Church in South Africa

Biko addressed himself directly to the Church. As his spiritual mentor, Aelred Stubbs, explained ‘Ministers of religion have an importance in black society which a secularised Westerner will find hard to understand’.⁴² According to Stubbs, Biko and Bennie Khoapa, who was then working as a YMCA staff worker and educationist based in Durban, realised

³⁹ Denis, ‘Seminary Networks and Black Consciousness,’ 165.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

⁴² Stubbs in Biko, *I Write*, 58.

the need to “‘conscientise’” this key section of the black community’.⁴³ Biko was not an orthodox Christian but was ‘a religious person in the broad sense of the word’.⁴⁴ He was fully aware as well that ‘anybody who would attempt to try and influence the black population politically and de-emphasise religion would not succeed’.⁴⁵ It was thus important for the Black Church leaders to be won over. In a way similar to the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in America, which ‘issued the challenge for black pastors to become “relevant” and to examine the implications for faith of the slogan and politics of Black Power,’⁴⁶ Biko and SASO sought to challenge the church on the relationship between faith and politics, and emphasise the intentionality of God’s will that had made them black. Although Biko did not dismiss the Christian faith outright, he remained critical of the institutional Church, which was for him an ‘institution...not so distant from other institutions like segregated schools and universities, which in turn were not distinct from the law and the state’ and these were, in his view, ‘the antithesis of God’s basic laws’.⁴⁷ For Biko belief in and obedience to God were made synonymous with ‘the exploration of his own ‘ultimate consciousness’” and he ‘fulfilled his definition of a selfless revolutionary by knowing before he died that he, too, would have to give his life for “eradication of evil”’.⁴⁸

Biko stood on the sidelines of orthodox Christian faith in his reduction of religious experience to ‘the exploration of his own ultimate consciousness’. But it was a standpoint that offered remedial insight into the shortcomings of established religion,⁴⁹ specifically how the church in South Africa had colluded with colonialism, as it amplified tolerance and patience in the face of racial oppression, and downplayed the Biblical mandate for social justice. Biko’s challenge to the Church was strong enough for a present-day observer to remark that for a layman the range of his theological insights was ‘breathtaking’ and that he ‘framed a theological agenda that in all honesty we have yet to exhaust’.⁵⁰

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Wilson, ‘Biko: A Life’ in Pityana et al., *Bounds of Possibility*, 43.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 43-4.

⁴⁶ Pityana, ‘Black Theology’, in De Gruchy and Villa-Vicencio (eds.), *Doing Theology in Context*, 173.

⁴⁷ Wilson, ‘Biko: A Life,’ in Pityana et al., *Bounds of Possibility*, 44.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ I draw the idea of ‘remedial insight’ from Gavin Ashenden’s study of the Christian poet, scholar and novelist Charles Williams, *Charles Williams: Alchemy and Integration* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2007).

⁵⁰ T.S. Maluleke, ‘May the Black God Stand Please! Biko’s Challenge to Religion’, in Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives!*, 123.

In his address to the Conference of Black Ministers of Religion at Edendale in May 1972 titled, 'The Church as seen by a Young Layman,' Biko mounted a serious critique of the institutional Church in South Africa. As the title of his talk indicated, Biko began by acknowledging that he was speaking as a young man to his elders, and as a layman to ordained ministers. He acknowledged the salience of his generational standpoint and the growing gap between generations, which bore the characteristic of a 'hitherto orthodox situation... fast becoming obsolete in the minds of young people'.⁵¹ But he objected to the gate-keeping of religion, confined as it was to the 'monopoly of so-called theologians' and therefore adopted an explicitly layman's approach to the question of religion.⁵²

Biko defined religion in universalistic terms. He noted how all major religions 'form man's moral conscience,' attempted 'to explain the origin and destiny of man,' and how all religions 'claim or almost claim a monopoly on truth about the nature of the supreme being and about the way to identify with his original intention about men'.⁵³ From this broad definition, Biko focused in on how a religion of necessity 'is intricately intertwined with the rest of cultural traits of society'. Christianity had undergone 'rigorous cultural adaptation from ancient Judea through Rome, through London, through Brussels and Lisbon,' but when the religion was brought to the Cape, 'it was made to look fairly rigid.' Thus the 'people amongst whom Christianity was spread' had to accept a cultural package of Western values, dress and thinking, and reject all that was associated with their own indigenous culture.⁵⁴ Thus 'stripped of the core of their being and estranged from each other... the Africans became a playground for colonists'.⁵⁵ From this, the worst possible application of the new religion, a situation had developed where scripture was interpreted with an 'appalling irrelevance'. In a country where racial oppression and bigotry was the way of life, 'black people were made to feel the unwanted stepchildren of a God whose presence they cannot feel'.⁵⁶ The Church compounded the situation with an 'inward-directed definition of the concept of sin and its encouragement of a *mea culpa* attitude'.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Biko, *I Write*, 58.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 61

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

In Biko's opinion, Christianity had been corrupted by colonialism and this distortion continued through to its current interpretation, which had transformed it into the 'ideal religion for the maintenance of the *subjugation* of the same people'.⁵⁸ The situation was accurately reflected by the fact that the church in South Africa, although overwhelmingly black, was led equally by an overwhelmingly white leadership. It had become institutionalised and its goals and priorities were directed away from the pressing needs of its congregants, to the furtherance of its own institutional aims. In summing up his attitude to the Church, Biko reflected, firstly, that Christianity had become too much of a 'turn the other cheek religion' without meeting real needs; secondly, that it was 'stunted' by its bureaucracy and institutionalisation; thirdly, that its structural organisation showed a tacit acceptance of the *status quo* that equated all things white with value; and fourthly, that it had become hopelessly limited by overspecialisation.⁵⁹

Biko's response to the situation was firstly to counsel caution about 'our white Christian counterparts,' who although brothers in Christ had not shown themselves to be true brothers in deed. Liberal whites were stunting the initiative of Black Christians within the Churches and thereby preventing the radical change in power-relations that was needed. Biko urged Black ministers to use what power they had, specifically to caucus and manoeuvre themselves into positions where they could challenge white power in the synods and councils. They also needed to align themselves with the initiative of Black Theology. In Biko's definition, Black Theology was 'a situational interpretation of Christianity,' which 'seeks to relate the present-day black man to God within the context of the black man's suffering and his attempts to get out of it'. Emphasis had to shift from moral inhibition to the root cause of black suffering. In short, the new theology called for an end to teaching people to 'suffer peacefully'.⁶⁰

Biko's insights on Christianity were central challenges to those working within the Black Theology Project. Biko's position took Black existentiality as its starting point and extrapolated the need for a relevant theology. The new theology sought a structural definition of sin; it sought to correct inward-looking Christianity, and moved to a socio-political critique of society, as experienced by Black people. The theology questioned the utility of suffering and posed the need for greater individual responsibility. The emphasis in SASO circles on the

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* Emphasis in the original.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 64

need to 'go it alone' extended into theology. As Biko ended his address, 'I would like to remind the black ministry, and indeed all black people that God is not in the habit of coming down from heaven to solve people's problems on earth'.⁶¹ The challenge 'Black man, you are on your own' therefore rang true in the Church as it did in South Africa more broadly.

Black Theology Branches Out

In 1972, the Interdenominational African Minister's Association (IDAMASA) officially endorsed Black Theology (the organisation had been founded in 1915, almost as early as the oldest nationalist movement, the ANC).⁶² The previous year, in 1971, the *SASO Newsletter* reported on a meeting between the Executive of SASO, IDAMASA and the Association for the Social, Cultural, Educational and Cultural Advancement of the African People of Southern Africa (ASSECA) in March, to 'define areas of cooperation and spell out the direction taken by each organisation in its work'.⁶³ The conclusion of that meeting was an agreement between SASO and ASSECA to 'cooperate in all matters that affect the educational advancement of the black people'. SASO also asked ASSECA to 'act as mediators between students and parents in the event of misunderstanding arising out of student involvement in genuine student politics'. In return SASO would 'keep ASSECA informed on students activities on the campuses'.⁶⁴ The meeting reflected a strategic attempt by SASO to move beyond student politics to connect with the remaining political bodies of substance in the black community. This strategy would lead to the establishment of the 'adult wing' of SASO, the Black People's Convention in 1972. The move reflected as well, an attempt to overcome the generational divide, which was a prominent feature of the life experience of the students of the Black universities.

Stalwarts of the older black generation still played a role in South African public life. Bishop Alphaeus Zulu's involvement in the Black People's Convention and his position as chair of the World Council of Churches provides a compelling insight into the involvement of the older, established clergy, with the Black Consciousness Movement. Mabel Maimela points to the importance of the Anglican Church that provided a wealth of committed

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁶² D. Herbstein, *White Man, We Want to Talk to You* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978), 70.

⁶³ 'News in Brief,' *SASO Newsletter*, 1, 1, (May 1971), 5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

priests, who were able to engage with the Black Consciousness Movement, especially initially through the working groups of the Black Theology movement.⁶⁵ This was in part because the new discourse found an audience in the older priests, who while firmly within the liberal camp, could understand and empathise with the new radicalism, seeds of which can be identified among members of their own ranks from previous generations.

The missiological concept of a 'subversive subservience'⁶⁶ helps to discover antecedents to the Black Consciousness strategy of struggle played out through the 'axioms and aesthetics'⁶⁷ of daily practice in Church life and governance. Although the rhetoric of racial polarisation separated Black Consciousness activists from liberal churchmen, both shared a strong concern with the meaning of black liberation. In their insight that spiritual liberation could precede physical liberation, the church and Black Consciousness leaders shared common ground. SASO had realised the potential that lay in the Church and thus the 'ban on cooperation with white liberals did not extend to fearless men of God who saw Black Consciousness as a religious movement designed to purge the Church of the sin of white supremacy'.⁶⁸ The response to Black Theology of the Anglican Bishop of Zululand, Alphaeus Zulu, revealed, however, deeper tensions.

New Wine in Old Wineskins? The Black Clergy and Black Theology

In a paper presented to a 1972 inter-seminary conference, published in *Pro Veritate*, Alphaeus Zulu acknowledged the importance of Black Theology, but based his assessment of the new trend on the proviso that not all theologies were necessarily Christian. This was because '[i]f people desire very seriously and trust certain objects, their struggle to understand and speak of such objects will be their theologies'.⁶⁹ He did regard Black Theology as Christian, as it attempted to 'understand and describe the significance to, and relevance for black people' of the Christian God. He also recognised that Black Theology would not be

⁶⁵ Maimela, 'Black Consciousness and White Liberals,' 50.

⁶⁶ W. Saayman, 'Subversive Subservience: Z. K. Matthews and Missionary Education in South Africa,' *Missionalia*. Found at: <http://www.reocities.com/missionalia/saayman.htm> (accessed on 08 March 2011); and L. De Kock, 'Civilising Barbarians' *Missionary Narrative and African Textual Response in Nineteenth-century South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, Lovedale Press, 1996).

⁶⁷ J. Comaroff and J.L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa*. 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991 and 1997).

⁶⁸ Fredrickson, 'Black Power in the United States and Black Consciousness in South Africa,' 197.

⁶⁹ A. Zulu, 'Whither Black Theology?', *Pro Veritate*, 11, 11 (March 1973), 11.

understood by the ‘average white Christian’ for the reason that it ‘derives from the black man’s experience which is the convex [sic] side of white experience and few white men ever identify sufficiently with black to be able to fathom these depths’.⁷⁰ It was, Zulu recognised, a theology whereby the black Christian recognised himself to be a human being and an ‘object of redemption, in the sense of liberation’. Alphaeus Zulu interpreted Black Theology as a call to a deepening of the Christian liberation in Christ. This was a process that was not without its dangers, and Zulu emphasised the role that mature Christians had to play in keeping Black Theology ‘Christian’.

Zulu felt it an ‘anomaly’ that mainly young black Christians had embraced Black Theology, while the older black clergy and theologians had been ‘caught napping’.⁷¹ Young black South Africans were increasingly leaving the church. The generational divide was a wider point of concern; from 1960 to 1975, the African high school population increased ‘seven fold’⁷² and by 1980 half of the African population were younger than 21.⁷³ Colin Bundy has linked this demographic shift to the wider literature on revolutionary change, and draws on comparative case studies from student revolts in Mexico in 1968 and at the end of Franco’s rule in Spain. He uses Karl Mannheim’s sociological definition of a ‘social generation’ (those who ‘participate in the common destiny of that historical and social unit’⁷⁴) to suggest a distinct “‘youth” component’ in South African popular resistance.⁷⁵ Bundy’s use of the demographic factor, and his comparative approach which linked South African resistance to the ‘general crisis in capitalism’⁷⁶ of the late 1960s to early 1970s period, has been challenged. Nozipho Diseko, for example, has contended that there are ‘elements of youth culture which can be shared with members of other generations’.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷² Bundy, ‘Street Sociology and Pavement Politics,’ 312.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 310.

⁷⁴ K. Mannheim, *Essays on the Sociology of Knowledge* (London, 1952), cited in Bundy, *cit.*, 305.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁷⁶ E.J. Hobsbawm, ‘Intellectuals and the Class Struggle,’ in E.J. Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries*: (London, 1973), cited in Bundy, *cit.*, 308.

⁷⁷ N. Diseko, ‘The Origins and Development of the South African Student’s Movement (SASM) 1968 – 1976,’ *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 18, 1 (March 1992), 44. Diseko questions Bundy’s reliance on the ‘demographic factor,’ arguing that Soweto secondary school enrolment was substantially lower than believed. Diseko contends that by 1974 ‘dissatisfaction with the limitations of Black Consciousness led to the establishment of links with the ANC’ and that because this shift went unnoticed the decline in the fortunes of Black Consciousness after the 1976 uprising ‘seemed abrupt’ (40). Diseko argues further that the SASM was formed in 1968, ‘having nothing to do with the Black Consciousness Movement which did not exist at the time’ or the ANC (42).

Biko agreed that change was underway, with the young increasingly taking initiative, but emphasised the nuance of the situation. When asked by Gerhart whether SASO and the BPC would clash due to the younger age of SASO activists and the conservative stance of older black leaders, Biko objected. The ‘older generation’ had given the lead to the ‘younger generation,’ he argued, to take up the cause of cultural change under the ‘this question of blackness’. But, Biko expressed ‘very little faith in old people’. The movement emphasised ‘totality of involvement’ and had no room for ‘hangers-on’. Biko was happy for older people to agree with the Black Consciousness standpoint, but rejected interference by them.⁷⁸

The generational divide was an explicit concern for Alphaeus Zulu, and he worried about the possible distortions the new radicalism among the youth could take. One of the dangers was the tendency to make theology the ‘handmaid of the black revolution’.⁷⁹ He had difficulty with ambiguous phrases ‘which describe God as being “for blacks and therefore against whites”’ and the expression that ‘blacks are oppressed *because* they are black’.⁸⁰ The danger inherent in the terms used by young activists was the essentialising of oppression they entailed; Black theologians needed to ‘bear in mind continually that he is *using the terms “black” and “white” as symbols for oppressed and oppressor*’.⁸¹ It was perfectly conceivable that the tables could be turned after liberation and blacks could become the oppressors. In his understanding of ‘black’ and ‘white’ as symbols of oppression, Zulu was in fact closer to the Black Consciousness definitions of the terms. Although blackness was essentialised, it was in virtue of black existentiality, the black experience of the world as the oppressed.

Zulu’s discussion provides insight into the ways the established clergy mediated the claims of Black Theology. Zulu had been one of the original participants of the Cottesloe Consultation between 7 and 14 December 1960, and one of only seventeen black representatives, alongside Professor Z.K. Matthews and the Rev. E.E. Mahabane, then the General Secretary of the Methodist Church. Zulu had been a Vice-President of the Christian Council of South Africa (later South African Council of Churches)⁸² and was also a President of the World Council of Churches during the tumultuous year of 1970, when the WCC’s

⁷⁸ Gerhart, ‘Interview with Steve Biko,’ in Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives!*, 32.

⁷⁹ Zulu, ‘Whither Black Theology?’, 12.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 13. Emphasis in the original.

⁸¹ *Ibid.* Emphasis in the original.

⁸² P. Walshe, *Church Versus State in South Africa*, 11.

Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) began to source funds to southern African liberation movements.

The WCC decision had caused ‘an emotional tide of reaction’ from the South African churches and public.⁸³ Pityana, later a director of the PCR, argued that the decision unleashed ‘an avalanche of anger from the white establishment both in the churches and in politics’.⁸⁴ Zulu, also the Anglican Bishop of Zululand, was the only Churchman to comment publicly on the decision, which he regarded as rash given the South African churches had not been properly consulted.⁸⁵ But three years later even Zulu recognised the shrinking space open for those committed to non-violence. He made the point forcefully in his T.B. Davie Memorial Lecture at the University of Cape Town in 1972. ‘Very few whites in this country are committed to non-violence and there is no reason why there should be any more commitment among blacks,’ he observed.⁸⁶ He struck a pragmatic tone when he added that ‘[t]he harshness with which discrimination is enforced by law and custom makes a black man look simple and naive if he continues to believe and talk of non-violence ever becoming effective’.⁸⁷ Zulu was in fact prepared to go further, and advocated the South African Churches resign from the WCC *en bloc*.⁸⁸ By 1974, he was prepared to resign from the WCC as president, even if the South African churches did not follow him.⁸⁹

Alphaeus Zulu’s concern with the increasingly polarised situation was one which was based on a lifetime of commitment to the welfare of his church and congregants. The appearance of the new spirit of resistance, initially at least, evoked a guardedly positive response from him. As a leader of the previous mission-schooled generation, he undoubtedly belonged to a markedly different educational background to those in the segregated black universities and seminaries. Along with such figures as Professor Matthews and Chief Albert Luthuli,⁹⁰ Zulu had also adopted critical positions and embarked on protracted micro-

⁸³ Cited in B. Pityana, ‘Tumultuous Response: The Voices of the South African Churches,’ in P. Webb (ed.), *A Long Struggle: The involvement of the World Council of Churches in South Africa* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), 89.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Walshe, *Church Versus State*, 115.

⁸⁶ Pityana, ‘Tumultuous Response,’ 96.

⁸⁷ Cited in Walshe, *Church Versus State*, 116.

⁸⁸ CPSA AB 1291/A WCC Central Committee 1973; Letter to Rt. Revd. T.G.V. Inman, 1 March 1974.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ For a new study of Albert Luthuli that foregrounds the centrality of his Christian belief for shaping his nonviolent political stance, see Scott Couper’s, *Albert Luthuli: Bound by Faith* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2010).

struggles within his own church (his election as Bishop of Zululand and Swaziland in 1966 being one victory), which can be interpreted as a form of protest.⁹¹

A similar voice that sought to interpret, and translate, the claims of Black Consciousness, emerged in Rev. Ernest Baartman, a Methodist clergyman. Rather than being a message of *polarisation*, Baartman interpreted Black Consciousness as a call to a more radical love and discipleship. Like the Lutheran theologian, Manas Buthelezi, Baartman interpreted Black Consciousness as a call to Christian *responsibility* on the part of black South Africans. For their white compatriots, the radical message of Black Theology was to walk in the 'way of the cross'. As the 'haves' identified by Baartman, whites were challenged to abnegate power and privilege and to start listening rather than directing. 'Whites must listen, listen and listen again...They need to learn to wait and take suggestions from blacks'.⁹² The emergence of Black Consciousness in South Africa, although linked to definite and prescriptive claims on what constituted political liberation, appears also to be a new democratic discourse that resonated in divergent audiences within South Africa.

There were wider signs of the influence of Black Consciousness on the established churches. The Catholic Bishop's Conference circulated a discussion document in early 1974, which Cardinal Owen McCann commended to the laity and South Africa. 'This year we are pledging ourselves to Reconciliation, both between God and man, and between all men'. For such reconciliation to be possible, it was essential that there be mutual understanding, and McCann and the Conference recommended that the articles it enclosed be studied so as to discover the sources of renewed social disquiet.⁹³ Prominent in the collection of three articles, was a concise and clearly argued argument by auxiliary Bishop of Johannesburg, P. Buthelezi, which showed that Black Consciousness sought to recover the dignity of the oppressed who were, according to the social teaching of the Church itself, possessors of 'human rights... built into man by God'.⁹⁴ Citizenship was a right for which Black Consciousness strove, Buthelezi observed, the fulfilment by which it could 'serve God'. In its defence of the most maligned and abused section of society, Black Consciousness in fact defended 'all humanity' and only worked 'in separation to re-establish those who have been disinherited'.⁹⁵

⁹¹ I. Macqueen, 'A different form of protest: the life of Bishop Alphaeus Zulu, 1905 – 1960,' *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, 23 (2005), 171-202.

⁹² E. Baartman, 'Black Consciousness', *Pro Veritate*, 11, 11 (March 1973), 6.

⁹³ P. Buthelezi, 'Statements on Black Consciousness and human rights,' 1. Found at www.aluka.org (accessed 2 July 2010).

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Along with Butelezi's discussion piece, a statement by the YCW championed the right for black workers to unionise and condemned disparities 'based on race or sex' as 'totally unjust'.⁹⁶ A statement by four signatories, J. Nkosi, L. Mokoena, P. Lephaka and S. Mkhathshwa, cautioned that the Church needed to 'welcome and inspire the phenomenon of Black Consciousness' if it wished to retain the loyalty of blacks. The Church, they observed, could only credibly claim to defend human rights if it rose above the 'present socio-political situation' and provided a 'model of alternative life styles [sic]'. This 'dilemma' was part of 'the continual choice between Jesus Christ and Mammon, the accepted social standards of the world around us or the new ones of the Cross and Resurrection'.⁹⁷

The stronger stand on racial reconciliation that the Catholic leadership sought in 1974, was taken even further by the SACC in the same year, when the body passed an historic motion calling on its member churches to support conscientious objection. The country's armed involvement was not a 'just war,' and it was therefore consistent with Christian doctrine that believers should become conscientious objectors. The conference further commended the courage of those who had already been jailed for their witness against the country's unjust laws.⁹⁸ The SACC motion evoked a strongly-worded statement from Prime Minister Vorster; he judged that the statement was calculated to bring about a confrontation with the state, and he ominously warned 'those who play with fire in this way must consider very thoroughly before they burn their fingers irrevocably'.⁹⁹ It was in later years, especially with the appointment in 1978 of a new General Secretary of the SACC, Bishop Desmond Tutu, that Vorster's battle with the SACC reached new levels of intensity.

Conclusions

This chapter has reassessed the neat sequencing of the relationship between Black Consciousness and Black Theology, implied by Pityana's observation that the relationship between the two is 'that one is a genus of the other'.¹⁰⁰ The discussion has suggested, instead, a more symbiotic relationship, where Black Theology significantly broadened the scope for

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁹⁸ M. Horrell, D. Horner, J. Hudson (eds.), *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa: 1974* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1975), 47.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ N. Pityana, 'What is Black Consciousness?', in Moore, *Black Theology: the South African Voice*, 63.

the impact of Black Consciousness thinking on South Africa. Theology became another way in which dialogue emerged between activists within the country and allies abroad, as well as providing a way of challenging the established church to the prevalence of injustice and oppression in South Africa. Biko and the Black Consciousness activists found a receptive audience in black priests and young black seminary students, who took up the Black Consciousness challenge and looked to be relevant in their own situations, significantly widening the scope of initial Black Consciousness concerns with liberal condescension and black emasculation. While Black Theology emerged out of a complex set of relations, initially under the auspices of the UCM, it developed independently to create a 'political faith,' which sought to make sense of oppression and to ally the image of a fighting-Christ to the cause of liberation. The black seminaries were critical, providing a ready and useful space where SASO and BPC could host conference and draw membership from. Seminary students voiced their dissatisfaction with their churches, and moved to take a stronger stand on segregation in their churches. The political rhetoric of black activists, though, belied a more complex and interesting set of relationships, which is the focus of the next chapter.

The Christian Institute, Spro-cas and the Black Consciousness Movement, 1969 - 1977

‘Whoever is not for me is against me’ (Matt. 12:30).... both sayings of Jesus belong, in reality, necessarily together...[W]hen, under the pressure of anti-Christian powers, small confessing congregations gathered and had to seek a clear decision for or against Christ through strict discipline of doctrine and life... these confessing congregations were forced to recognize that the very neutrality of many Christians was the gravest danger of the church, indeed, that it was essentially hostility toward Christ... [This saying] gained, precisely through this concentration on what is essential, an inner freedom and openness that protected it from all anxious efforts to erect boundaries... And thus it came to know the other saying of Jesus as a living experience: ‘Whoever is not against us is with us.’

– Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *c.* 1940 – 1943¹

This chapter further engages the themes addressed in chapter four, which explored the historical relationship between Black Theology and Black Consciousness and showed that the seminaries and Christian churches were significant and consequential allies for the development of Black Consciousness. This chapter broadens the historical understanding of the impact of Black Consciousness thinking on South Africa, by focusing specifically on the small body of the Christian Institute, with the South African Council of Churches, and its constituent church members. This chapter emphasises the significant cross-fertilization that occurred, which helped to prepare the ground for the radical action of later years. The Christian Institute and SACC were both committed to the ecumenical imperative. The Christian Institute was formed in 1963 under the leadership of Beyers Naudé in the wake of the withdrawal of the Dutch Reformed churches from the WCC after Cottesloe.² In 1966 the SACC appointed South African-born Anglican Bishop of Grahamstown, Bill Burnett, to the post of general secretary, bringing ‘about a close liaison with the CI,’ which became a ‘member organisation of the CCSA’ in 1967.³

¹ D. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 59-61.

² Thomas, *Christ Divided*, 167.

³ *Ibid.*, 167-8.

The implications of the ecumenical ideal of the SACC and Christian Institute needed to be developed and refined in context, and as such entailed a process that was by no means clear. From the formation of the Christian Institute in 1963, to its final destruction at the hands of the state in 1977, the understanding of what its ‘mission’⁴ was, how and through whom this ideal would be achieved, and the very significance of political change and prophetic witness were to shift dramatically. Whereas the focus of the thesis so far has been primarily on English-speaking liberal students and their relationship to SASO leaders, exploring the links between the Christian Institute and the Black Consciousness Movement helps conceptualise the relationship between *verligte* (‘enlightened’) Afrikaners who staffed the organisation and the black activists, and understand further the nature of this aspect of Afrikaner liberalism and radicalisation.

Individual voices of protest also witnessed to the state’s abuses and infringement of human rights at this time. The Anglican priest and Missions to Seamen minister in Cape Town, Rev. Bernard Wrankmore, undertook a widely publicised 40 day fast at a Muslim Shrine on Signal Hill, Cape Town, on the anniversary of the death of Imam Hadjee Abdullah Haroun in 1971. Wrankmore demanded that the government appoint an inquiry into the suspicious circumstances of the death of the Imam, who died in 1969 whilst being held for questioning by the Security Branch, until which time Wrankmore refused to give up his fast.⁵ Cosmas Desmond, a Catholic priest, conducted research and published a ‘highly disturbing’ exposé of approximately 60 of the government’s ‘resettlement camps’ titled *The Discarded People* and published by the Christian Institute in 1970. The book was banned and its author served with particularly severe banning orders that restricted him to his house and forbade him any visitors.⁶

The position of the Church in South Africa rang true in many ways to the crisis of conscience of the ‘Confessing Church’ in Nazi Germany. The Christian Institute and after 1968, the SACC, looked for precedent and lessons to be learnt from the example of the Confessing Church in Nazi Germany and to the Reformed theology of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The 1968 *Message to the People of South Africa* was consciously modelled on the Barmen Declaration of 1934, which sought to reassert the Church’s commitment to

⁴ Bosch explores the sharp changes in the understanding of mission in the 20th century by using Thomas Kuhn’s idea of paradigm shifts. D.J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991).

⁵ ‘Country without a Conscience,’ *Pro Veritate*, 10, 6 (Oct. 1971), 17.

⁶ M. Horrell, D. Horner and J. Kane-Berman, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa: 1971* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1972), 50.

Christ, as above any of the claims of nationalism. Writing in the war years of Nazi totalitarianism, the martyred Lutheran theologian and German resistance leader, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, identified clear commitment against ‘anti-Christian powers’ to be the hallmark of authentic Christianity. Christian freedom was to be found through personal commitment and sacrifice. This emphasis protected ‘from all anxious efforts to erect boundaries’. The authentic Christian community was not the institutional church, but the persecuted ‘gathered people who had travelled from afar’ who sought out the protection of the community.⁷

The theologian John De Gruchy refers to the development of a ‘theology in dialogue’ in South Africa with the work of the martyred theologian.⁸ The ‘broad Church’ of a confessing body of believers reflected the exigencies of the hour. Conceptualising the role of the church more broadly in the struggle in South Africa requires a similar adjustment in thinking, requiring a shift that moves ‘beyond the institutions and official religious organisations – and even beyond the famous names – to the church at the base, the church of small groups and of individuals, to see a whole complex of religio-political structures’.⁹ Indeed it was on this micro-level that individuals made commitments, and in turn required support.

The Christian Institute and Black South Africa

Although they were critical in their individual stances on apartheid, the ecumenical churches in South Africa in the 1960s acquiesced to the state, leading Pityana later to dismiss their ‘tumultuous response’.¹⁰ Numerically the Christian Institute was small and this led some to deprecate its significance. In a short article published in 1974, Manas Buthelezi assessed the significance of the Christian Institute for Black South Africa. He recognised, firstly, the ambivalence of Blacks in South Africa towards the Christian Institute as a white-dominated, multi-racial organisation, and the hopelessness of its strategy of goodwill because of the

⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 59 – 61.

⁸ J.W. De Gruchy, *Bonhoeffer and South Africa: Theology in Dialogue* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1984).

⁹ A. Egan, ‘Douglas Thompson: Christian socialist, radical democrat: a political biography,’ (Ph.D. thesis, University of Witwatersrand, 1999), 5. Egan notes his frustration with the blurred nature of the concept ‘the church,’ which while possessing theological coherency, lacks historical explanatory power. He suggests a closer focus on individuals and small groups operating in parishes, and especially individuals and small groups ‘operating with, and sometimes within, the Left’ (5).

¹⁰ B. Pityana, ‘Tumultuous Response: The Voices of the South African Churches’ in P. Webb (ed.), *A Long Struggle: The involvement of the World Council of Churches in South Africa* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994), 84-101.

intransigence of white South African society. Buthelezi likened the Christian Institute to a 'hungry tramp' who tried to retrieve the food crumbs of 'certain discarded Christian values from the dirt bin of the South African way of life'.¹¹

Although he recognised that the strongest political influence lay with the DRC, the largest of the Dutch Reformed churches, Buthelezi nonetheless went on to emphasise that the real power of the Christian Institute was in their 'witnessing and suffering'. Through Spro-cas, Buthelezi accepted that the Christian Institute had taken practical steps to show their commitment to political change. The government's proscription through bannings and arrests, under the direction of the Schlebusch commission interim reports, was the Christian Institute's proper contribution to a theology that transcended words and instead was embodied in lived experience – namely 'the theology of the cross'. When 'the ministry of words has lost its efficacy, prophets are called upon to communicate the saving message through the essence of their lives'.¹² It was in this physical suffering that the Christian Institute held significance for Buthelezi, 'it is the power of the theology of the cross the Christian Institute is now living'. It was this theology that was readily understood because Blacks, according to Buthelezi, 'have always lived it, theology of power beyond words'.¹³

Manas Buthelezi was a leading exponent of Black Theology in South Africa.¹⁴ He had been appointed as Regional Director of the Christian Institute for Natal in the middle of 1973. Together with the appointment of Jane Phakathi as Regional Director for the Transvaal and Orange Free State, they were the first signs of the Christian Institute's attempts to adjust to a new context that acknowledged the need for black and female leadership.¹⁵ Buthelezi was a figure with extensive contacts in the Christian church in South Africa. Trained as a Lutheran minister, he had completed a Masters Degree at Yale University Divinity School and a Ph.D. at Drew University in 1968. On his return to South Africa, in the same year, he had been minister at Ekutuleni Church in Melmoth, a lecturer at the Lutheran Theological College at Mapumulo until 1970, and minister again at Sobantu Lutheran Church at Edendale until 1971.¹⁶ It was Buthelezi's theological work, however, that

¹¹ M. Buthelezi, 'The Christian Institute and Black South Africa,' *South African Outlook* (October 1974), 162.

¹² *Ibid.*, 164

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Walshe, *Church Versus State*, 159.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 158-9.

¹⁶ D.S. Deane, *Black South Africans. A Who's Who: 57 Profiles of Natal's Leading Blacks* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1978), 34-5.

'began to turn the world of the churches upside down'.¹⁷ In characteristic Black Consciousness strategy, he sought to inverse the power relationship, arguing that it was the duty of Black Christians to evangelise whites. Although Black Consciousness had reclaimed the political role of blacks in society, black Christians now needed to take the initiative of evangelism *within* the churches to save whites from the apostasy of racism.

The churches were to become mission stations of a different order – missions rather reaching *out to* white South Africa.¹⁸ This change would aid the dawning realisation of the faults of the multiracialism the Christian Institute had espoused from its foundation and through the course of the 1960s. The Institute became sympathetic to the rhetoric of Black Consciousness activists that white liberals could not fully understand the black situation, and by direct insinuation, that they were ineffective and largely inconsequential appendages in an essentially Black cause. As a white-run, white-funded Christian body, the Christian Institute paradoxically replicated the pattern of power-relations that had been the marked feature of Christianity in South Africa. In seeking meaningful change, the organisation's leaders and members were increasingly thrown up against their own limitations as a white-run organisation. Although the executive tried to address the problem with the recruitment of a new 'tough minded black leadership,' the attempt to recruit black leaders was done only belatedly.¹⁹ But the role played by Black leaders operated less overtly than being office holders. It was early contacts with the forceful characters of SASO that pushed members of the Christian Institute towards a more radical position. This was true especially of founder, Beyers Naudé.

Naudé was born into a staunchly conservative and deeply pietistic Afrikaner Nationalist family. He began his studies at Stellenbosch University in 1932, where he was lectured in sociology by Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, and he sparred with future Prime Minister John Vorster in one of the university's two debating societies.²⁰ At university he met Ilse Hedwig Weder who was the daughter of Moravian missionaries based at Genadendal in the Western Cape and who was to become his wife.²¹ Through his visits to Ilse's family, Naudé was exposed to the Moravians' less rigid approach to race relations on account of their close

¹⁷ Walshe, *Church Versus State*, 159.

¹⁸ This point is made strongly by Walshe, *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁰ C. Ryan, *Beyers Naudé: Pilgrimage of Faith* (Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip, 1990), 20.

²¹ The Moravians first established a mission at Genadendal in 1737 later resumed in 1791. Elphick and Davenport, *Christianity in South Africa*, 34, 328.

cooperation with the Coloured community, particularly their mixed worship at church services. These visits to the Moravian mission station sparked his later interest in 'race relations and missionary work'.²²

Naudé's second 'metamorphosis,' from a liberal to a radical, followed his first conversion from a nationalist-supporting *dominee* ('minister') to a liberal activist and occurred from his intimate contact with black people. Former Methodist minister, Cedric Mayson, argued that Naudé's change of heart had come because he came to personally know black people. This was, according to Mayson, '[a] central theme in everybody who made that change, including Beyers'.²³ Reflecting on his relationship with Biko, Naudé noted how much he had learnt, specifically the need to relinquish leadership of the struggle to blacks, and for the white community to 'get rid of the old spirit of paternalism, of white liberalism, to say to the black community: Over to you'.²⁴

This personal engagement was a significant stimulus in overturning inherited patterns of thinking. It was also a process that left-wing radicals needed to undergo. As the activist and Wits sociologist of labour, Eddie Webster, described it to a NUSAS seminar in Cape Town in December 1973: '[f]or a white to liberate himself from racism... [demands] a long and difficult intellectual and psychological process. It requires firstly, an awareness of precisely how deeply racism has permeated our concepts of reality and our identity'. Webster needed to experience an extended period of reconditioning and engage intellectually with the historical forces that had shaped him. This then allowed a 're-discovering' of 'the history of our country and the culture of its peoples'.²⁵ The process was made more difficult, however, by the power of apartheid by the late 1960s, as it fostered separate ethnic identities and sought to elide South Africa's contested recent and older past.²⁶

Naudé and the Christian Institute also equated the rejection of racism with Christian repentance, or '*metanoia*'. The term implied a radical rethinking of life-values and orientation, 'a radical change in man's thinking and a conversion... away from all forms of selfishness,

²² Ryan, *Beyers Naudé*, 22.

²³ C. Mayson interview in Ryan, *Beyers Naudé*, 124.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

²⁵ E. Webster, 'Black Consciousness and the White Left,' Address to NUSAS Seminar, Cape Town, December 1973, 7. Found at: <http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za> (accessed 05 May 2009).

²⁶ Lunn, 'Hippies, Radicals and the Sounds of Silence'.

toward God and his fellow men'.²⁷ This change demanded action. In a two-part paper, published in *Pro Veritate*, Mark Collier, an ex-student of the Dominican seminary at Stellenbosch who had quit his studies in 1968 to work for the Institute on a full-time basis and later left the Dominican Order in 1969,²⁸ recognised that many people had already passed through a *metanoia*. For them, the problem now became how to 'put this change into effect'.²⁹ Buthelezi's emphasis on the way of the cross came to mean in political terms, the sacrifice that white South Africans would be required to make in personal comfort and wealth. The 'theology of the cross' provided a way to acknowledge and stand up to the valid Black Consciousness critique that for black people to be brought up, it necessarily entailed some whites 'coming down'.³⁰

The Christian Institute Cape Office

The Christian Institute office in Cape Town, under the leadership of the Revd Theo Kotze, reflected the way in which a broad church position could welcome people of many faiths and persuasions. Like Naudé, Kotze was the scion of a respected Afrikaans family. His marriage to Helen Clegg, Methodist and English-speaking, and his decision to enter the ministry in the Methodist church, were catalysts of a more critical engagement with apartheid and race relations in South Africa.³¹ As the theologian James Cochrane reflected on his own involvement, '[t]he wide-open ecumenism practiced by Kotze at the CI in Cape Town played a significant role in bringing the most unlikely people together, often leading to enduring friendships'.³² For the White Conscientisation Programme, one wing of Spro-cas 2, Kotze welcomed Neville Curtis as the leader of the programme, a 'recent past president' of NUSAS and 'a declared atheist,' together with the senior researcher Dot Cleminshaw, a 'well-known human rights activist and agnostic'. The third staff member was Ivor Shapiro, who was 'a

²⁷ H. Küng, *On Being a Christian* (London: Collins, 1977), 191. Cited in K.-N. Oh, 'Sagehood and Metanoia: The Confucian-Christian Encounter in Korea', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 61, 2 (1993), 314.

²⁸ Denis, *The Dominican Friars in Southern Africa*, 265.

²⁹ M. Collier, 'Apologia Pro Vita Nostra,' *Pro Veritate*, 8, 1, (Ma7 1969), 4.

³⁰ Gerhart, 'Interview with Steve Biko,' in Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives!*, 34.

³¹ Ryan, *Beyers Naudé*, 129.

³² J. Cochrane, 'Agapé: Theo Kotze and the Cape Office of the Christian Institute,' *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 118 (March 2004), 61.

gifted writer and then still Jewish'.³³ According to Cochrane, this openness was possible despite the commitment of the Christian Institute and Kotze to a Christian position, because the principles of both the organisation and its leaders lay firstly in a commitment to justice, and secondly, to a commitment to individual people. It was 'an ecumenism based on the unity of praxis, out of which the faith of the faithful was strengthened and the credibility of the gospel defended', Cochrane judges.³⁴ This ecumenism was achieved precisely because of their commitment to the value of human dignity and because of openness to the 'convictions and gifts of others'.³⁵

The Christian Institute indeed found innovative ways of developing an inclusive communion and bringing individuals together. At the Cape Office, Kotze pioneered what was known as the 'fellowship meal', or 'Agapé,' which was celebrated weekly. The Agapé meal captured the religious and theological character of the Christian Institute; it embodied the ecumenism that 'held the CI together'.³⁶ It further 'provided enormous spiritual sustenance to those who came, a forum for discussion, a source of breaking information, and a means of coordinating action'. As Cochrane, and activists he interviewed remember, the Agapé meal was 'the catalyst for much,' it was 'the origin...of the "fluidity" that marked the work of the Institute: its ability to draw together people with differing levels of engagement and conviction without requiring them to prove their activist credentials'. It was then 'a place of nurture'.³⁷

The experiences of the Cape office resonated more widely with the activities of the Christian Institute as an organisation. Through the Spro-cas programmes, as we will see shortly, the Christian Institute was actively drawn beyond the walls of its institutional Christian base and into the realm of progressive, activist politics, and thus embodied 'an ecumenism based on the unity of praxis'. Through its radical stance the organisation was also drawn into solidarity with international struggles for social justice. For example, the version of the Lord's Prayer used in the CI Agapé was drawn from the *Cotton Patch* version of the Bible, translated by Clarence Jordon – leader of the *Koinonia* experiment, based in Americus,

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Georgia, in the United States.³⁸ This version of the Lord's Prayer saw the line 'and lead us not into temptation' replaced with 'and do not bring us to breaking point'. This liturgical borrowing symbolised 'an extended community' of which the Christian Institute was part, linking it to contexts beyond South Africa.³⁹

Jorissen Street Ecumenism, Johannesburg

In Johannesburg, too, activists made use of the city space and civil society offices in Braamfontein as their organisational base. Mosibudi Mangena was a Sotho-speaking student at the University of Zululand, Ngoye, who became a member of SASO and later National Organizer of the BPC. He was on the SRC at Ngoye under the president of the devoutly Catholic Mthuli ka Shezi, who was later also the SASO chairman for the university and 'one of the first martyrs of the BCM'.⁴⁰ Mangena was recruited to the SASO cause by UNB students who came to visit the campus, among them Charles Sibisi and Biko. As a member of the BPC National Executive Committee, Mangena was present at their first meeting on 2 January 1972. The organisation had meagre resources and was forced to share the UCM offices at Dunswell House in Jorissen Street, Johannesburg. The UCM leaders were pleased the organisation could be 'benevolent and gracious on its death bed' and Mangena reflects that 'by using the offices and other facilities of the dying UCM, we seemed to be rising from their ashes'.⁴¹

Mangena describes the way in which the Johannesburg central business district space facilitated contact and discussion among activists. Chris Mokoditsoa and Mokgethi Motlhabi, leaders of the UCM Black Theology Project, hosted the BPC in the 'first four months of 1972 in the offices of the UCM'. This move brought Mangena and the BPC staff into close contact with the other activists and organisations. Mangena recalls that '[o]pposite the street in Pharmacy House was the SASO Transvaal regional office, the South African Council of Churches, AICA and the Christian Institute'.⁴² There was also the staff of the Black Workers' Project, who 'operated from Pharmacy House', and this allowed 'consultations and

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ M. Motlhabi, 'Foreword,' in M. Mangena, *On your Own: Evolution of Black Consciousness in South Africa/Azania* (Braamfontein: Skotaville, 1989), ii-iii.

⁴¹ Mangena, *On your Own*, 36.

⁴² *Ibid.*

interactions among activists' to be 'easy and frequent'. Mangena was thus easily able to 'go over the road and compare notes with Ranwedzi [Nengwekhulu] who, like me, was in the habit of trotting all over the country organising branches and sorting out problems at local levels'.⁴³

Mangena's recollections capture the way in which the Johannesburg city space facilitated contacts between activists and organisations. It indicates that in Johannesburg, SASO and the BPC were established alongside the Christian Institute and SACC, and that the BCP took over the premises and facilities of the UCM. According to SASO activist, Sipho Buthelezi, metropolitan Johannesburg played a significant role in bringing Black students together, becoming 'the melting pot of national student politics' as students from the country's economic centre dominated the national student scene.⁴⁴ Mangena's stay in Johannesburg, however, was short-lived, as the police raided the BPC offices in June 1973, and arrested him along with Sipho Buthelezi. They were both later tried and convicted on the purported grounds of 'recruiting for military training'.⁴⁵

The Study Project on Christianity in Apartheid Society (Spro-cas 1), 1969 – 1971

Spro-cas was an initiative of the Christian Institute and SACC. The project was the culmination of a chain of events initiated when Beyers Naudé and Archbishop Bill Burnett of the SACC attended the WCC 'Conference on Church and Society' in Geneva in 1966. On their return to South Africa, the Christian Institute and SACC jointly hosted a countrywide set of conferences to discuss the Geneva decisions. The final conference, the 'National Consultation on Church and Society,' was held in Johannesburg in February 1968.⁴⁶ The publication of *A Message to the People of South Africa* in September 1968 by the SACC, was the product of the committee formed at the National Consultation, and written in conjunction with the Theological Commission of the SACC. The main writers of the *Message* were Anglican chaplain Rev. John Davies, Dr Ben Engelbrecht of the NGK, and Rev. Calvin Cook of the Methodist Church.⁴⁷

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 36-7.

⁴⁴ S. Buthelezi, 'Black consciousness in the late 1960s,' *CEAPA Journal*, 1, 2 (Dec 1987), 24.

⁴⁵ Lobban, *White Man's Justice*, 27.

⁴⁶ Walshe, *Church Versus State*, 58.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 60-1.

Whereas the *Message* presented a theological critique of apartheid, the Church still needed to answer the question for the white electorate of what economic and political system could adequately replace apartheid. The Christian Institute and SACC responded by setting up a study project under the directorship of Peter Randall, who came from a liberal English-speaking background and had been an assistant director of the SAIRR for five years.⁴⁸ Although Randall had only nominal church connections to the Methodist church, he was, in Naudé's opinion, the best candidate for the role. Naudé's decision to appoint Randall reflected a tough-minded approach to societal intervention on the part of the Christian Institute that refused to draw fruitless distinctions between believer and non-believer.

Introducing Spro-cas *Pro Veritate* editor, Ben Engelbrecht, pointed out the project's goal. South Africa needed a 'radical liberation' from its 'ideological bondage', a 'shattering of the evil illusion that walls of division between people... can preserve and perpetuate peace and harmony, justice and righteousness'. Although this seemed improbable, the Christian hope of conversion and redemption could not be abandoned, and what applied to the individual could '*mutatis mutandis*, also happen to a political and social structure'.⁴⁹

Jointly funded by the Christian Institute and the SACC the first stage, Spro-cas 1, ran from 1969 to 1971 and set up study groups and commissions to examine and report on every sector of South African society. Six study commissions were formed to study economics, education, law, politics, sociology and the Church.⁵⁰ The invitations to join the Spro-cas commissions were signed by both Bishop Burnett and Naudé.⁵¹ The second phase, the Special Project for Christian Action in Society, Spro-cas 2, ran from 1972 to 1973 and sought to implement the findings of the study commissions.

The ambitious first stage started with small beginnings in 1969, with 'an office, a director, a secretary, and warm encouragement' from the leaders of the sponsoring bodies, Naudé of the Christian Institute, and Burnett of the SACC. As the Spro-cas director, Peter Randall recalls that the programme began without any prior feasibility studies or pilot projects, or even a guarantee of funds. 'The director literally sat at an empty desk and wondered how to go about things'.⁵² It was, therefore, very much a 'venture of faith on the

⁴⁸ Ryan, *Beyers Naudé*, 131.

⁴⁹ B. Engelbrecht, "'Spro-cas' – An Essential Project,' *Pro Veritate*, 8, 4, (August 1969), 3.

⁵⁰ P. Randall (ed.), *Anatomy of Apartheid: Spro-cas Occasional Publication No. 1* (Johannesburg: SPRO-CAS, 1970), 5.

⁵¹ WHIP A 835/Ad3 iv-v, Economic Commission: general correspondence 1969 – 1972.

⁵² P. Randall, 'Spro-cas Revisited: the Christian contribution to the political debate,' in Villa-Vicencio and de Gruchy, *Resistance and Hope*, 166.

part of a small group of Christians who were convinced that such a project was both desirable and necessary'.⁵³ Spro-cas proved to have a more significant impact on the Christian Institute than the SACC. This was because a close working relationship developed among staff members of the two, and due to, what Randall judges, the 'greater flexibility and adaptability of the CI's structures and its generally more open and receptive style'.⁵⁴

The Spro-cas study commissions attracted criticism from Biko and members of SASO, who regarded the whole endeavour with the same suspicion meted out to the other multiracial organisations. Biko saw the attempt to formulate an alternative to apartheid, as doomed to failure, because 'they [were] looking for an alternative acceptable to the white people'.⁵⁵ Pityana later criticised the Spro-cas commissions' failure to consider 'the will of the majority of the people of South Africa' and the oppressed 'to be a sufficient barometer' for an alternative social and political order in South Africa, noting the 'succession of black leaders' of whom Nelson Mandela and Albert Luthuli were ready examples, who had articulated exactly such alternatives.⁵⁶ He wondered whether the vision encapsulated in the Freedom Charter was not a clear enough statement of the basis of a new society and felt the Charter's recommendations were overlooked in the search for a political solution acceptable to white South Africa.

There was justification for the SASO critique. In both form and approach, Spro-cas followed what Adam Ashforth calls a 'Grand Tradition' of study commissions, organised to examine and describe African life and to formulate responses to the 'Native Question,' in which 'experts' and scientific knowledge were marshalled to generate a form of discursive authority that can be interpreted as a form of state power.⁵⁷ Although not generated by the state, Spro-cas followed a similar approach, where experts were consulted on African life and where change was still considered to be within the control of white politics. The Carnegie Commission is a closer historical comparison, in which the Afrikaans educationist E.G.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁵⁵ Z. Mbali, *The Churches and Racism: A Black Perspective* (London: SCM, 1987), 50. Cited in Pityana, 'Tumultuous Response,' 87.

⁵⁶ Pityana, *Ibid.* Pityana's examination of the response of the Churches to the 1970 decision by the WCC to fund Southern African liberation movements is highly critical, but he shows how the churches affiliated to the WCC moved beyond weak-kneed subservience to the State in the 1970s, to side firmly with the oppressed in the 1980s and into direct confrontation with the State's 'total strategy'. Pityana does not address how this change came about, albeit referring to the importance of the leadership of Beyers Naude, Desmond Tutu and Frank Chikane as Secretary Generals of the SACC during the 1980s.

⁵⁷ A. Ashforth, *The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

Malherbe played a leading role, and was funded by the American philanthropist's corporation. But a solution was still being sought within white society.

Writing in the first Spro-cas occasional publication, *Anatomy of Apartheid* (1970), Peter Randall discounted the possibility of internal revolution due to the efficiency of the police and military apparatus. Given that foreign intervention was improbable as well, Randall argued that 'significant change in the near future can only come from within the White group, and more importantly from within the ruling political party'. Thus he pointed with hope to the growing '*verligte*' movement in the Nationalist Party and the trends of urbanization and prosperity among Afrikaners, which, he suggested, augured well for significant change, though not necessarily in the 'direction of a shared or common society'.⁵⁸ Randall also considered economic factors, but he warned against any 'facile optimism for early change' stemming from the economic situation. The base assumption of the Spro-cas meetings, evident here in Randall's discussion of possible avenues for political change, was that whites remained very much the custodians of power.

From the start of Spro-cas, Randall had a formidable task on his hands to coordinate the activities of the six study commissions and to maintain contact with his funders, the Christian Institute and SACC. Reading the Spro-cas papers reveals a flurry of correspondence between Randall and Naudé, as well as the wide array of public figures that were involved in each of the commissions (including liberals of an older generation like Paton and Edgar Brookes). But discontent was also brewing. The Economics Commission was especially problematic, as there was strong resistance to the inclusion of Richard Turner as a member of a new sub-committee formed in 1970. A colleague of Turner's on the commission, Dr. André Muller, wrote to Randall to express concern that the new participants, particularly Turner, Lowry and Fransman 'should *not* be regarded as members of the economic commission'.⁵⁹ They were, Muller argued, 'unable to make a useful contribution' and some of them 'are extreme leftists'. The economics report as a whole was in danger and could be discredited by the government, based on the composition of the commission. Further, Muller regarded some of their views as 'contemptible'. Contrary to Theo Kotze's form of 'ecumenism based on the unity of praxis,' he worried, 'Turner and Fransman are [not] Christians – the latter, I understand, is a Jew), and neither seem to share the common

⁵⁸ Randall, *Anatomy of Apartheid*, 11.

⁵⁹ WHP A835/Ad3 iv-v; Economics Commission: general correspondence 1969-1972, Letter from Dr André Muller to Peter Randall, 16 September 1970.

Christian ethic of the rest of the commission'. If it happened that 'one of them should be listed as a communist, our Sprocas will become tainted in the same way as has now happened to the World Council of Churches,' and Muller warned that '[a]ll our efforts would have been in vain, as they would not have any impact'.⁶⁰

In another letter in the same month, Rufus Kenney wrote to Randall expressing concern that 'the thoughts of Herbert Marcuse appear to have made considerable impact on the minds of some members of the sub-committee, and I can hardly imagine our sponsors being enthusiastic over Marcus [sic]'.⁶¹ Randall's decision to include Turner and to resist opposition to his inclusion proved well-founded, although it was in the political commission that Turner was to make more of an impact, particularly with his publication of *The Eye of the Needle* in 1972.

Some reviews of Turner's *The Eye* were extremely critical, as they maintained the book reasserted core liberal premises; the importance of the individual's conscience and the salience of transcendental values. One reviewer, 'R.W.F.', explained that the 'characteristic liberal dichotomy' between 'the facts' and transcendental values to which they were compared, persisted in the book. The argument was addressed, moreover, to 'the individual,' who was pressed to make an informed choice, presuming the correct information, which Turner provided, and failing which they were presumed to be 'evil'. Such political argument led 'directly to that impotent moralising about politics' for which liberals were 'so justly disliked' and radicalism 'far from presenting an alternative to these central defects of liberalism, is seen carrying them to extremes'.⁶²

Dissent within Spro-cas extended beyond complaints about the inclusion of Turner, Lowry and Fransman. Writing to Peter Randall in 1972, after the submission of the final report of the economics commission, Trevor Bell, an academic based at Rhodes University, felt forced to dissociate himself from the report. He explained to Randall that after studying the report 'extremely carefully,' he had decided that he could not subscribe to its conclusions, particularly because 'the case for substantial social change in South Africa is not argued as forcefully as it could be, and that the report's ability to influence public opinion in South Africa, which I take to be its aim, is thus impaired in several ways'.⁶³ He observed that the

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ WHP A835/Ad3 iv-v; Letter from Rufus Kenney to Peter Randall, 22 September 1970.

⁶² 'Awareness is the key to change,' *Race Relations News*, 34, November 1972, 8.

⁶³ WHP A835/Ad3 iv-v; Letter from Trevor Bell to Peter Randall, 11 January 1972.

commission's conclusions did not deal adequately with trade unions and that the 'political difficulties' the report raised were inadequately dealt with, with the result that the fall-back appeal on "‘Christians [whose] faith impels them to be on the side of the under-dog’" was inadequate and rested on a weak analysis and the lack of a practical solution.⁶⁴

By the end of Spro-cas 1 and the last study commission report, Randall had coordinated a large output of publications and books. Ivor Shapiro, a staff worker with Spro-cas, reflected after the final report was released: 'Spro-cas has produced 20 paperback books in well under three years – each of them a significant and readable contribution to South African non-fiction – and by 10 May a total of almost 58 000 copies has been distributed'.⁶⁵ Despite the publication achievement there was further detraction. In a review in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* the Wits political scientist, Alf Stadler, criticised the overall tone of the reports as 'meliorist' and observed that 'much of its published work was a debate involving impossibly diverse groups'.⁶⁶ There is some evidence that the flurry of publication activity that surrounded the conclusion of Spro-cas 1 did at least influence debate in the country. This was apparent, for example, in an address given by Chris Mzoneli, which melded intellectual developments in a paper on 'Black Theology in a Plural Society', where he acknowledged his use of the concept 'plural' to Dr Lawrie Schlemmer's contribution to the Spro-cas publication, *Anatomy of Apartheid* (1970). It was, Mzoneli noted, 'a sociological term to describe the diversity of our society – in terms of race, nationalism, culture and tribalism'.⁶⁷

The attraction of pluralism was not surprising given the broader liberal framework of many Spro-cas commission members. From the late 1960s, sociologists Leo Kuper, M.G. Smith and Pierre van den Bergh bolstered the idea of pluralism in several publications such as Kuper and Smith's *Pluralism in Africa* (1969) and van den Bergh's *South Africa: A Case Study in Conflict* (1965) and *Race and Racism* (1967). The concept easily accommodated the notion of distinct ethnic groups (although ethnicity was widely confused with race in popular and academic usage).⁶⁸ The development of critical sociology and its emphasis on economic relations and class challenged this focus, evidenced in some of the detractions from the Spro-cas commission conclusions. The social scientist, Bernard Magubane, who had been Kuper's

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ WHP A835/B11i; Letter from Ivor Shapiro to 'Bookseller', undated.

⁶⁶ A. Stadler, 'Anxious Radicals: SPRO-CAS and the Apartheid Society,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 2, 1 (1975), 102-8.

⁶⁷ WHP A2176/6.14 South African Students Organisation. 'Black Theology in a Plural Society'.

⁶⁸ Dubow, 'Ethnic Euphemisms and Racial Echoes,' 360-1.

student at the University of Natal in the early 1960s, challenged pluralism in 1969 for its 'lack of historical dimension and for neglecting the social and economic basis of social cleavage in society'.⁶⁹ A few years later, Martin Legassick similarly charged that class was the critical element lacking in the 'pluralist perspective'.⁷⁰ Young scholars based at London, Oxford and Sussex universities, including the exiled Stanley Trapido and the Canadian radical scholar F.A. Johnstone, and 1960s NUSAS activist and scholar Legassick, who was based in Brighton for a time, mounted the revisionist challenge.⁷¹ Soon '[d]og-eared copies of papers given at Oxford, Sussex or London' secretly circulated in 'Johannesburg and Durban', and a 'photocopy culture' developed 'in tandem' with political developments in the country.⁷²

Peter Randall and Spro-cas members finally decided to distance themselves from a pluralist conception of South African society, for its ambiguity over the crucial question of political power. After closely considering the idea, the political commission report issued in 1973 identified a 'fundamental distinction between two possible courses of action in the transition towards a multi-racial South Africa: on the one hand, the liberal conception of the Common Society, on the other, the "Plural States" option'.⁷³ The latter was implicitly rejected as a suspected guise for a refinement of domination rather than a genuine alternative. If there was detraction from the final report from the political left, conservative members were also critical. The Wits political scientist, Denis Worrall, strongly defended 'the plural states' option as he judged the approach to protect liberal democratic values and to be 'the only pragmatic means of influencing the government in a positive direction'. Worrall showed his true colours when he joined the National Party in 1974 and later supported P.W. Botha's reforms of the 1980s.⁷⁴

The Special Project for Christian Action in Society (Spro-cas 2), 1972 – 1973

Spro-cas 2 sought to implement the findings of the Spro-cas reports. Although the conclusions of the Spro-cas reports were far from unanimous and clear, the form the second stage took indicated a significant shift had occurred during Spro-cas 1. Between 1971 and

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 362.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 363.

⁷¹ B. Bozzoli and P. Delius, 'Radical History and South African Society,' *Radical History Review*, 46, 7 (1990), 19-20.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷³ Dubow, 'Ethnic Euphemisms and Racial Echoes,' 363.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

1972, the Christian Institute was 'on the brink of a major reorientation',⁷⁵ challenged by the leaders of the BCM to the weakness of liberal solutions, they launched Spro-cas 2 as the Black Community Programmes under the directorship of Bennie Khoapa and Steve Biko, with a separate, white conscientisation project, under Horst Kleinschmidt.

In Cape Town, Neville Curtis, the NUSAS past-president who had been one of the participants of the Abe Bailey conference, was made the Cape Town co-ordinator of the Spro-cas 2 projects. Randall's close work with the Christian Institute in Johannesburg served as a model for Curtis. In a letter of 28 March 1972 to Curtis, Randall wrote, 'CI is already heavily involved in Spro-cas programs, at all sorts of levels. I hope you will establish similar working relationships with CI staff, board of management and, increasingly, membership, as we have evolved in Johannesburg'.⁷⁶ This close working relationship appeared to evolve in the Cape as well, as letters and reports of Spro-cas organisers to the Western Cape Council of Churches show, and as Cochrane and Walshe remark, how 'the robust political activism of the Christian Institute's Cape Town staff' could be equated with 'the new mind of SPRO-CAS II'.⁷⁷

Apart from dealing with internal dissent on the reports of Spro-cas 1, Randall also later had the challenge of keeping Spro-cas 2 within the remit of its mandate. He was forced to fire Neville Curtis, the Spro-cas coordinator in Cape Town, when Curtis committed Spro-cas 2 to a national convention on labour, contrary to Randall's wishes. John Rees of the SACC and Naudé both supported the ending of Curtis's employment with Spro-cas.⁷⁸

The state and white South Africa were about to be shaken out of complacency a year later by the 1973 Durban Strikes. They began on early on 9 January 1973 when 2000 workers from the Coronation Brick and Tile factory assembled to march to a nearby football stadium to demand a minimum pay increase from R 8.97 to R 20.00 a week, which was later raised to R30. The workers returned to work after two days, with the intervention of the Paramount Chief of Zululand, Goodwill Zwelithini, and agreed to a R2.00 increase to R11.50 a week. The strikes, however, spread through the city and its major industrial centres of Pinetown

⁷⁵ Walshe, *Church Versus State*, 134.

⁷⁶ WHP A835/B11i; Letter from P. Randall to N. Curtis, 28 March 1972, cc: Danie van Zyl, Bennie Khoapa, Horst Kleinschmidt.

⁷⁷ WHP A835/B11v. Cochrane, 'Agapé: Theo Kotze and the Cape Office of the Christian Institute', 61. Walshe, *Church Versus State*, 143.

⁷⁸ WHP A835/B11ii.

and New Germany, and Jacobs/Mobeni.⁷⁹ Over the course of the first three months of 1973, 61 000 workers went on strike, an estimated third of Durban's total African work force, directly affecting 100 companies. This figure compared to a total of only 23 000 workers who had struck between 1965 and 1971 nationally.⁸⁰ The immediate material gains of the striking workers were relatively small, with employers only agreeing to small pay increases. What the strikes achieved was to lay the 'groundwork... for the development of a union movement' that prioritised the interests of the workers, and signalled 'that workers were winning new control over their lives'.⁸¹

The Durban strikes indicated a new type of independence, where workers wrested control to enable greater freedom to unionise. Spro-cas 2 also showed the Christian Institute's support for a new approach where the oppressed could take the initiative. As the Institute grew more committed to 'give power to others,' and grew more willing to accept the leadership and insights of the Black Consciousness movement, it was able to discover a new role and new life.⁸²

Conclusions

The Christian Institute provided a vital institutional network, aligned closely with the South African Council of Churches, which provided a protected space for activists and which developed a particular sensitivity to the argument of self-identity of the BCM. Spro-cas provided a valuable initiative which, while misdirected in its aims, provided the impetus for new ideas and a tabling of political alternatives that shaped wider debates. Turner's critic, 'R.W.F', had been accurate in one sense – the refinement of the moral appeal, central to liberal politics, facilitated the radical political engagement with Black Consciousness in the early 1970s, especially helped by the backing and institutional support of the churches. The ecumenical ideal of the Christian Institute was a facilitative approach that brought people together, even where differences were emphasised, as in the case of Black Consciousness

⁷⁹ Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, 38-9.

⁸⁰ Alan Paton Centre (hereafter PC) 126/4 1973, Gerhard Maré collection, 'Durban Strikes and Wages Commission'. Unpublished pamphlet, '1973 Durban Strikes – 20th Anniversary'. Sources: Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*. Institute of Industrial Education, *The Durban Strikes 1973* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1974). *NUSAS Newsletter*, 4, '1973 Freedom and Unity Year' (1973).

⁸¹ Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, 496.

⁸² Walshe, *Church Versus State*, 145.

activists. This ecumenism proved problematic, indicated by the dissensions within Spro-cas 1 and the critical reception of the Spro-cas 1 reports by the academic community and activists.

In their endeavours to be true to a prophetic faith, the Christian Institute came to take a much more radical stance, reinforced by the challenge of Black Consciousness, which brought them increasingly into opposition with the state. Placed under house arrest from 1973 onwards, Naudé had responded to Biko's challenge that the political situation in South Africa required him to choose sides. In the aftermath of the Soweto Riots and the death of Steve Biko in police custody, the Christian Institute was banned in 1977. One of the last *Pro Veritate* issues carried a full report on Biko's death. The powerful motif of Christian martyrdom rung powerfully true in the last days of the Christian Institute, reaffirming that the Christian way led ultimately to the Cross and death in the hope of the Resurrection.

Black Consciousness in Dialogue: Richard Turner, Stephen Biko and the 'Durban Moment', 1970-1974

In an important sense both whites and blacks are oppressed, though in different ways, by a social system which perpetuates itself by creating white lords and black slaves, and no full human beings.

– Richard Turner, July 1972¹

Turner² met Biko in Durban sometime in 1970.³ He had been newly appointed to his first permanent post of lecturer at the department of political science at the University of Natal on the Howard College campus. Biko was still studying for his medical degree at the University of Natal Medical School Non-European section (UNNE).⁴ Durban had become the *de facto* headquarters of SASO, with Biko's room in the Alan Taylor residence functioning for a time as the national office. Turner came to the University of Natal as someone with a growing reputation for close involvement in student politics, an incisive intellect, and as an individual who possessed a clarity of vision that was sorely needed.

From 1970 to 1974 the city of Durban held unique political and cultural importance for South African progressive politics, as it shifted from its previous status as a bastion of conservatism, to become the site of student radicalism and trade union activism.⁵ Durban

¹ R. Turner, 'Black Consciousness and White Liberals,' *Reality* (July 1972) in Karis and Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence*, 431.

² My thanks to Gerhard Maré, Richard Pithouse, Vashna Jagarnath, Nafissa Sheik and Stephen Sparks for input into this chapter at an early stage of its writing. My thanks as well to Catherine Burns for her comments on a draft version. My thanks to the participants of the Southern Africa Seminar, University of London, and the History and African Studies Seminar, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal for their questions and feedback.

³ Morphet gives this date for their meeting as it was when Turner moved to Durban, in T. Morphet, 'Richard Turner: A Biographical Introduction,' in R. Turner, *The Eye of the Needle: Towards Participatory Democracy in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1980), xix. Helen Lunn suggested that Turner and Biko could well have met each other earlier, after Turner's return to South Africa in 1966, given their close involvement in NUSAS between 1967 and 1970. Conversation with author, Johannesburg, 20 April 2010.

⁴ Noble observes that UNNE was the medical school's first official designation after being opened in 1951. During the early 1970s Black students pressured the university to drop the designation "Non-European" in favour of "Black". The university responded by changing the name to the University of Natal medical school or University of Natal Faculty of Medicine in official designation, though the Medical School Student Representative Council began to refer to the medical school as University of Natal Black section (UNB). The medical school was also referred to as "Wentworth medical school" by those students whose residences were located in the Wentworth, near to the university. Noble, 'Doctors Divided,' 6.

⁵ Lunn, 'Hippies, Radicals and the Sounds of Silence.'

offered a space for interaction and dialogue, as parts of the city had proved more resistant to apartheid zoning. The medical school at the University of Natal, in particular, offered a political space for the discussion of ideas. It offered the only facility for the training of Black medical doctors in South Africa, and at a 'white' English-speaking university. UNB attracted a cohort of ambitious and articulate African students, many of whom had been through the politicising effects of Bantu Education at the 'Bush' universities, or had been expelled during the 1968 and 1972 university strikes. The students were able to cast a critical eye back on both inherited patterns of thinking, as well as the propaganda of the state in their 'homelands'.⁶

The University of Natal medical school, along with the University of Fort Hare, in fact proved to be most resistant to the new 'go it alone' approach advocated by SASO. The tradition of liberal non-racialism was entrenched particularly strongly among some of the Black student leaders at both centres. Ben Ngubane was a notable leader at UNB who was extremely resistant to the new type of thinking. The prominent Afrikaans educationalist and social scientist E.G. Malherbe was principal of the university from 1945 (then Natal University College) until his retirement from the position in 1965. Although his appointment as principal to Natal was something of a political exile from Pretoria, where he had previously helped to found and headed the National Bureau of Educational Research, Malherbe used the position to criticise apartheid and to defend the existence of the black Medical School, although he also remained a conservative in other respects.⁷

Also professor at Natal was senator Edgar Brookes, who had been principal of Adams College in the 1940s and was a leading member of the Liberal Party in the 1960s. Natal had become more important for liberal politics after the Liberal Party moved its headquarters to the province. The change signalled that the centre of power had shifted from the Cape and old liberals like Margaret Ballinger and Donald Molteno, to the new leadership of Paton, Brown, 'Selby Msimang, Leo Kuper, Manilal Gandhi, Jock Isacowitz, Pat Poovalingham' and Brookes and the dominance of 'arguments for universal suffrage and political struggle outside Parliament'.⁸

⁶ Buthelezi, 'The Black consciousness movement in South Africa in the late 1960s,' 24.

⁷ S. Dubow, 'Scientism, social research and the limits of South Africanism: The case of E.G. Malherbe,' *South African Historical Journal*, 44, 1 (2001), 139.

⁸ Vigne, *Liberals Against Apartheid*, 32-3.

Durban was unique too as haven to South African hippies and a counter-culture movement, with runaway school pupils drawn to its counterculture scene. The Furness Avenue area became a focus for alternative lifestyles and developed a countrywide notoriety for its defiance of South African norms. The city drew a group of people who were attuned to the protest-decade of the 1960s, listening to Bob Dylan and Frank Zappa, and were sensitive to currents of thought emerging from Europe and America.⁹ The city was also home to South Africa's largest population of Indians, including a substantial educated middle class, functioning as an intermediary between Europeans and Africans. Durban was unique in its racial composition, with Europeans forming a relatively smaller part of the total population than other South African cities and Indians filling white-collar positions where the possibility existed.¹⁰

As South Africa's most colonial city, Durban subtly set limits to the rigorous extremes of the Group Areas Act, comparable to the case of Cape Town and the American South, where segregation made notably slower inroads into the residential segregation of more established cities like New Orleans, which 'possessed pre-existing racial patterns that altered more slowly'.¹¹ Durban also historically had a lower presence of Afrikaans-speakers; the peculiar and complex identities of English-speaking South Africans, where feelings of social dislocation and cultural distance were particularly prominent, provided some critical perspective on South African society, more attuned to the burgeoning counter-culture explored in chapter two.¹²

With the powerful presence of the Zulu kingdom as a close regional factor, Durban was also an historical centre of new thinking about race relations. The Secretary for Native Affairs of Natal, Sir Theophilus Shepstone (1815 – 1893), was a prominent advocate for early proto-segregationist legislation, which envisioned the creation of native reserves and manipulated traditional authority for colonial rule.¹³ Durban was also a model for other

⁹ Gerhard Maré, interview with author, Durban, 13 August 2008.

¹⁰ L. Kuper, H. Watts and R. Davies, *Durban: A Study in Racial Ecology* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1958), 50-55. See also B. Freund, *Insiders and Outsiders: The Indian Working Class of Durban 1910-1990* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann 1995). Other important studies are B. Freund and V. Padayachee (eds.), *(D)urban Vortex: South African city in transition* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002) and P. Maylam and I. Edwards (eds.), *The People's City: African life in twentieth-century Durban* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press; Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996).

¹¹ V. Bickford-Smith, 'South African Urban History, Racial Segregation and the Unique Case of Cape Town?', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21, 1 (1995), 63-78; J.W. Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South African and the American South* (Cambridge 1982), 134, cited in Bickford-Smith, *cit.*, 74.

¹² For more see Lunn, 'Hippies, radicals and the Sounds of Silence'.

¹³ D. Welsh, *The Roots of Segregation: Native Policy in Natal (1845-1910)* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1973).

African cities, of the so-called 'Durban system,' whereby the city municipality controlled the brewing and sale of beer to the African working class, the revenue of which went into a separate Native Revenue Account for Native Administration.¹⁴

The city space, the university and the medical school, offered opportunity for exchange and dialogue and it was within this milieu that a special moment in South African political and intellectual history developed. Looking back, activists involved referred to it as 'the Durban moment' and acknowledged that it was due to 'a special set of circumstances'.¹⁵ The period from 1970 to 1974 in fact saw the melding of progressive political movements into closer dialogue than before. Using public spaces within the city offered the chance for interpersonal exchange and debate.

Among activists in the Durban scene, Biko and Turner stood most prominent in their breadth and force of intellect. It was their dialogue and respective ideas that in effect set the terms of the ferment of discussion and radical action. The chapter seeks to demonstrate how their collective force of personality shaped the thinking of activists around them, how they influenced one another, and how their creative collaboration lent itself to the refining of a political strategy. In the city space, the gap between radical thinking and praxis narrowed as NUSAS students from the university canvassed the local white population and assisted in the setting-up and the use of the poverty datum line, a vital resource for the Wages Commissions.¹⁶ Simultaneously, from their new offices in Beatrice Street, to which they had relocated at the end of 1972, SASO directed nationwide conferences, formation schools, seminars and community-help projects.

The 'Durban Moment'

Activist, academic, and friend of Turner's, Tony Morphet, coined the term the 'Durban Moment' in his Rick Turner Memorial lecture to the University of Natal in Durban on 27 September 1990. He used the term to describe four simultaneous intellectual projects taking place in the city between 1970 and 1974: Turner's philosophical and political work; Biko's formulation of the philosophy and political discourse of Black Consciousness and its

¹⁴ E.J. Popke, 'Managing colonial alterity: narratives of race, space and labor in Durban, 1870-1920,' *Journal of Historical Geography*, 29, 2 (2003), 248-267.

¹⁵ Maré interview.

¹⁶ For a close discussion of the use of the 'poverty datum line' in Durban see Davie, 'Strength in Numbers'.

community development projects; Dunbar Moodie's historical re-evaluation of Afrikaner history; and Mike Kirkwood's challenge to the English literature canon from a South African perspective.¹⁷ Together, these projects signalled a 'structural shift in the received intellectual patterns of the social world,' and were matched by stirrings in the black working class in the 'unpredicted, unexpected and revelatory 1973 Durban strikes'.¹⁸

The chapter looks to give historical detail to the 'Durban moment,' and the argument foregrounds the first two projects: Turner's and Biko's philosophical and political contributions. SASO's breakaway from NUSAS, and the percolation of a mood of black independence through the black churches and black students, had created a hiatus in the gradualism and moderate political reform envisioned by South African liberals. The need for radical change challenged the paternalist mindset so long a feature of liberal thinking. It was this 'problem of change' that formed the central theme in the contestations, debate and dialogue that were central aspects of the intellectual milieu. Although the emergence of Black Consciousness in South Africa played a central role in so effectively challenging the white liberal world-view, it was mediated through interpersonal dialogue and friendship. For white activists, this entailed a shift to radicalism in the form of class theory;¹⁹ an admittedly limited shift, as they still adhered to the linchpin of liberal thought, the salience and centrality of the individual consciousness.²⁰

The moment in Durban between 1970 and 1974 bore the characteristics of multiplicity, dynamic interrelationships, and a space in which 'distinct trajectories' existed. If we are to take seriously the challenge of thinking of time and space together, the Durban Moment emerges as a political event constituted by the sum of its parts. John Rajchman has observed a distinct relationship that exists between the city and the production of philosophy, in which philosophy is 'the city in the process of thinking' and where 'a city is not only a sociological object, but also a machine that undoes and exceeds sociological

¹⁷ T. Morphet, 'Brushing History Against the Grain: Oppositional Discourse in South Africa,' *Theoria*, 76 (October 1990), 92-3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁹ The impact of Black Consciousness in precipitating the dominance of class theory is argued for strongly by Nurina and Shireen Ally in, 'Critical Intellectualism: The Role of Black Consciousness in Reconfiguring the Race-Class Problematic in South Africa,' in Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives!*, 171-188; the argument is made in respect of radical sociology in S. Ally, 'Oppositional intellectualism as reflection, not rejection, of power: Wits Sociology, 1975-1989,' *Transformation*, 59 (2005), 66-97.

²⁰ Morphet, 'Brushing History Against the Grain,' 95.

definitions posing new problems for thinking and thinkers, images and image-makers'.²¹ As it emerges in the chapter, Durban was an important site in South Africa, which generated a burst of creative intellectual production from black and white intellectuals.

The Political Figure of Turner

Turner had been trained in British analytical philosophy, but was increasingly drawn into continental philosophy. He graduated from the University of Cape Town with a Bachelor of Arts Honours degree in philosophy in 1963. He wrote his doctoral thesis at the Sorbonne in Paris with a study of important points of political theory in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre, which he completed in 1966. The English title of his thesis was 'Some implications of existentialist phenomenology'.²² This was a formative stage of his life, a crucial step in what Morphet refers to as his conceptualisation of his life as 'a total project'.

Turner had been active in student politics before his critical philosophical study at the Sorbonne. As a student at the University of Cape Town, he had shared a room with NUSAS leader Jonty Driver.²³ After his return from his studies at the Sorbonne in August 1966, Turner brought a new standard of philosophical and political incisiveness to bear on student politics in South Africa.

Turner gave up farming and the second doctorate he had begun at the end of 1968 and took temporary positions, first at the University of Stellenbosch in the first academic term of 1969 and then at the politics department at Rhodes University in the second term. He took an active role in student politics, described as 'a disturber of the peace' by an unnamed Rhodes colleague.²⁴ During the same year, there were frequent weekend seminars at his farm outside Stellenbosch, Welcarmes, which attracted a large number of students who took the opportunity to study and discuss more deeply New Left ideas and thinkers.²⁵

In 1970 the University of Natal appointed Turner to a permanent position as lecturer at Howard College, Durban. From his return to South Africa and in the early 1970s Turner

²¹ Cited in Massey, *For Space*, 159.

²² Richard Turner Papers, E.G. Malherbe Library, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban [hereafter Turner papers], Supreme Court of South Africa (Transvaal Provincial Division), *The State versus S. Cooper and Eight Others*, Case No. 18/75/254 (Pretoria: Lubbe Recordings), 3005.

²³ C.J. Driver, 'Used to be Great Friends,' *Granta*, 80 (Winter 2002), 7-26.

²⁴ Turner papers, Republic of South Africa, *Fourth Interim Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Certain Organisations*, 91.

²⁵ Erbmann, 'Conservative Revolutionaries,' chapter 2.

was active as an advisor to NUSAS, travelling around the country giving seminars at the University of Witwatersrand, the University of Cape Town, and providing assistance to the NUSAS executive. Turner was a highly charismatic teacher and leader, functioning as a key facilitator of dialogue between students and activists in the Durban scene. Dick Usher, a local journalist who lived in Turner's back yard for a time, reflected that 'he was superb with students, making them feel their ideas were important and being more concerned with helping them refine their thoughts than imposing his own'.²⁶ In this characteristic, Turner shared a strong resemblance with Biko's leadership style, which was facilitative and empowering. As Lindy Wilson writes of Biko 'his presence ensured that people would be heard and their opinion considered. He engendered trust and freed people to use their potential'.²⁷

The years between 1970 and 1973 were the most influential for Turner's public life.²⁸ Using his permanent position as political science lecturer at the University of Natal as a base, his sphere of activity steadily expanded. Beginning with his first meeting with Biko in 1970, he had close contacts with members of SASO, as well as members of the Natal Indian Congress, the Coloured Labour Party and Chief Buthelezi. According to his own testimony, Turner was consulted often by members of these political parties on the nature of South African society.²⁹ Peter Randall, the Spro-cas director, invited Turner to join the Economics and Politics commissions, on which he served between 1971 and 1972.

Together with Raphael De Kadt and Michael Nupen in the political science department, Turner 'pioneered the teaching of radical political philosophy,' making Durban's politics department one of the most innovative in the country.³⁰ In his teaching Turner remained committed to the philosophical ideal of Socratic dialogue.³¹ Turner's commitment to social values, to fundamental and continued moral and existential investigation, reinforced

²⁶ D. Usher, 'Rick Turner: Prophet of the moral society,' *Weekly Mail*, 22-28 January 1988, 15.

²⁷ Wilson, 'Biko,' in Pityana et al., *Bounds of Possibility*, 27.

²⁸ Usher, 'Prophet of the moral society'.

²⁹ Turner also gave advice over trade union disputes and information for Phyllis Naidoo to escape to Lesotho in July 1977. Phyllis Naidoo, interview with author, 29 April 2010, Durban, South Africa.

³⁰ Usher, 'Prophet of the moral society'.

³¹ Turner papers, Greaves, 'Turner: moral visionary,' *Natal Witness*, 18 May 1993.

by his grounding in Western Marxism, allowed him a theoretically sophisticated moral vision by which political movements and praxis could be assessed.³²

Turner's influence was also felt through the impact of his writing as it stimulated new thinking in the country. Most prominent among his work was his provocative projection of a future South African society, *The Eye of the Needle*, which he published in 1972 as a contribution to the Spro-cas political commission. Other articles, like 'The Relevance of Contemporary Radical Thought,' also provided a stimulus for political thinking, and of a particular type – thinking which sought to reconceptualise political praxis for meaningful change. Biko had referred to Turner's article in his paper to the student conference held at the Abe Bailey Institute for Inter-racial Studies, held in Cape Town in January 1971, where he noted Turner's observation that it was likely that a future black government would be socialist.³³ Fredrick Van Zyl Slabbert and André Du Toit also organised a conference in Stellenbosch to discuss *The Eye of the Needle*.

Turner's banning under the recommendation of the Schlebusch commission, in February 1973, was intended to put an end to his public role as a facilitator of debate and radical thinking. His article, 'The Relevance of Contemporary Radical Thought' could not be included in the final Spro-cas political commission report, *South Africa's Political Alternatives*. Turner was banned together with NUSAS leaders Neville Curtis, Paul Pretorius, Paula Ensor, Phillipe Le Roux, Sheila Lapinsky, Clive Keegan and Chris Wood.³⁴ In spite of his house arrest, activists such as Communist Party member and defence lawyer, Phyllis Naidoo, continued to visit Turner and his wife, Fozzia, at their home in Dalton Avenue, in the Durban suburb of Bellair.³⁵ Turner used his banning to good effect; he embarked on an extended study of the role of individual agency in dialectical materialism, taught himself Portuguese so that he could follow the process of decolonisation in Angola and Mozambique, and learnt German to study the works of Hegel, Kant and Marx in the original.

³² Karis and Gerhart attribute Turner's significance to the particular historical circumstances of the 1968 to 1973 period, where 'the rupture between NUSAS and SASO created a situation where the force of Turner's personality and opinions intersected with the need among white student activists to find a new political identity and role'. As they note Turner 'was frequently invited to speak on white campuses and at NUSAS seminars, where his lucid analyses contributed both to the legitimisation of black consciousness ideas and to the spread of philosophical radicalism among white students'. Karis and Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence*, 70-1.

³³ Biko, *I Write*, 68.

³⁴ Karis and Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence*, 86-7, Footnote 7.

³⁵ Phyllis Naidoo writes that Bellair had previously been an Indian suburb, but was reclassified under the Group Area Act and its inhabitants forced to leave and the houses given to white railway workers and civil servants. Turner Papers, P. Naidoo, 'Who Killed Rick?', 2.

Although banned, Turner remained engaged with local and national developments. In May 1974 academics founded the Institute for Industrial Education at the University of Natal with its publication the *South African Labour Bulletin*.³⁶ From 1972 Turner had already initiated a programme of ‘action research,’ where groups of students would visit factories to collect research information from the workers on pay and working conditions in the Durban and Greater-Durban area.³⁷ The new Institute and its bulletin was an ‘ambitious intellectual project’ intended to provide shape and structure to these efforts, and were to have a lasting impact on shaping strategy in the re-emergence of African trade unions, one of the most salient features of the Durban moment. Central figures in the new institute were Harriet Bolton, Lawrence Schlemmer, John Copelyn, Alec Erwin, Foszia Fisher, Beksise Nxasana, Omar Badsha, Halton Cheadle and David Hemson, with homeland leader Gatsha Buthelezi acting as Chancellor.³⁸ According to Eddie Webster, Turner’s legacy was that ‘he successfully combined a radical vision of the future with an argument for the strategic use of power’.³⁹ Central to his strategy was the innovation of class theory and the notion of radical reform rather than a revolutionary rupture with the old order. Turner rejected armed insurrection, as well as economic sanctions, and instead advocated using the means available to effect radical change. Central to these means were the democratic trade unions.

The Political Figure of Biko

Biko’s personal trajectory was marked by the exigencies of apartheid. As we saw, he had been expelled from Lovedale on account of the political activities of his brother. Biko had been given a scholarship to attend the Catholic school of St. Francis at Marianhill. From there he was able to gain entrance to the University of Natal Non-European section (UNNE), later University of Natal Black section (UNB). Biko had entered the medical school at the University of Natal at the beginning of 1966.⁴⁰ Due to his extensive political commitments, Biko failed his fourth year of study and was forced to abandon his medical

³⁶ E. Webster, ‘Moral Decay and Social Reconstruction: Richard Turner and Radical Reform’, *Theoria* (October 1993), 5-7.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6. For more on Buthelezi see G. Maré and C. Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power: Buthelezi’s Inkhata and South Africa* (Ravan Press: Johannesburg; Indiana University Press: Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1987); and Mzala, *Gatsha Buthelezi: Chief with a Double Agenda* (London: Zed Books, 1988).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁰ ‘Biographical Summary’ in Biko, *I Write*, 1.

studies in 1970. He took up a law degree by correspondence from the University of South Africa that year, as well as working for the Black Community Programmes (BCP) in Durban, and helping to found the Black People's Convention (BPC) in 1971.⁴¹

Although Biko propagated the need for Black self-reliance, he was able to form and maintain close personal friendships with white student leaders. His friendship with Turner is a prime example. As Stubbs and Hugh Lewin wrote of Biko, his 'founding of SASO... never led to a breach of the good personal relationships he continued to enjoy with the white NUSAS leaders'.⁴² In spite of his friendly personal acquaintances, Biko remained clear on the need to relegate the white liberal to a secondary position; Black Consciousness demanded the self-emancipation of the Black oppressed. Biko described the role of the liberal, as he saw it, with a compelling analogy. They needed to serve as 'a lubricating material so that as we change gears in trying to find a better direction for South Africa, there should be no grinding noises of metal against metal but a free and easy flowing movement which will be characteristic of a well-looked-after vehicle'.⁴³

It is fair to say that Biko created an impression on whoever he met. Donald Woods described him as the greatest man he had the privilege of knowing.⁴⁴ He had a profound shaping impact on the form that Black Consciousness in South Africa took. Themba Sono, the former SASO president who left South Africa for studies in the United States (after falling foul of the SASO leadership for advocating working with government institutions), nevertheless judged the 'pivotal' factor in the development of Black Consciousness to be the 'overpowering mind of Biko'. More strongly, Sono foregrounds 'the charismatic personality of Steve Biko, without whom any discussion of the early phase if not the entire spectrum of Black Consciousness becomes sterile and ineffectual'.⁴⁵

As his compatriot and friend, Barney Pityana, recalled of 'long hours of interaction and debate among friends' at the Alan Taylor residence, it was Biko who was the central participant. '[H]e listened and challenged ideas as they emerged, concretised them, and brought them back for further development'. Although the refining of ideas was still a collaborative effort and was the product of consensus, 'it was Steve who translated that

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴³ Biko, *I Write*, 28.

⁴⁴ Woods, *Biko*.

⁴⁵ T. Sono, *Reflections on the Origins of Black Consciousness in South Africa* (Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1993), 2, 11.

common idea into essays that went into his columns as Frank Talk: *I Write What I Like*, and as memoranda to the SRCs and SASO Local Branches. It was Steve ultimately who concretised and articulated the ideas. He captured the common mind'.⁴⁶ It was this ability to formalise and systematise a mood and general consensus that was central to Biko's role. Mamphela Ramphele remembers how Biko would dictate to her as she would write.⁴⁷ His facility for communication was put to full use when at the July 1970 SASO student council meeting in Wentworth, Pityana replaced him as president, and Biko was elected chair of SASO Publications.⁴⁸ As Mzamane and Howarth note, this was 'a crucial post because the early to mid-1970s witnessed an outpouring of scholarship (on subjects like poetry, aesthetics, culture, politics, economics, and theology) within the movement'.⁴⁹ Notable publications were *SASO Newsletter*, *Creativity and Black Development*, *Black Review* and *Black Viewpoint*. Ramphele remembers how Biko spent well over a year working on the first *Black Review* 1972. 'Single-handedly Steve designed the first edition... The data was derived from newspaper cuttings, visits to newspaper libraries, and Hansard reports on parliamentary proceedings'.⁵⁰

Together with editorial assistants Malusi Mpumlwana, Tomeka Mafole and Welile Nhlapo, Biko worked from 'the second half of 1971 and the whole of 1972'.⁵¹ Due to Biko's banning, on completion and before the printing of the first *Black Review* in 1973, Biko's name had to be omitted, and Bennie Khoapa was instead named as editor. In the beginning of 1973 as a result of the findings of the Schelbusch Commission, eight NUSAS leaders and eight SASO leaders had been issued with banning orders.⁵² Whereas Turner was banned by the state in 1973 to his home in Bellair, Durban, Biko was sent to his 'homeland', confined to the magisterial district of King Williams Town. Biko's banning marked the end of his direct involvement in Durban and ostensibly the last direct encounter between him and Turner.

⁴⁶ Pityana, 'Reflections on 30 Years since the Death of Steve Biko,' 3.

⁴⁷ Wilson, 'Biko: A Life,' in Pityana et al. *Bounds of Possibility*, 39.

⁴⁸ M.V. Mzamane and D.R. Howarth, 'Representing Blackness: Steve Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement,' in L. Switzer and M. Adhikari (eds.), *South Africa's resistance press: alternative voices in the last generation under apartheid* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000), 182.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Ramphele, *Across Boundaries*, 67-8.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 82.

What was the nature of the relationship and interaction between Biko and Turner? Commentators have recognised that there were complex political relations between New Left student leaders and SASO,⁵³ and these political relations are well represented in the life of Turner. It can be argued that it was Turner's close relationship with black activists that helped him to continue to develop a critical political awareness. Tony Morphet makes the point that Turner's shift away from the 'confusions of the liberal position' was evinced by his contacts with the nascent Black Consciousness movement, most notably Biko. According to Morphet, Turner and Biko were introduced through Foszia Fisher, who was then a philosophy honours student at the university and interested in the Black Consciousness movement, but also critical of some aspects.⁵⁴

According to Morphet, Turner initially showed an 'over-reactive sympathy typical of the guilt felt by white liberals,' but through his personal contacts he was able to go beyond the initial reaction and become a sympathetic critic of the movement.⁵⁵ It was this step, beyond initial fear, that distinguished Turner and 'radicals' of the period. It was a step facilitated by their willingness to re-examine their own worldviews and values, drawn from the challenges posed by friends across the racial divide. As such it was friendship, rooted in reciprocity and dialectical reason, which helped steer liberals towards a more radical outlook.

One common point was that both Turner and Biko had a strong affinity for the philosophy of Sartre. Pityana observed that Biko 'laid his hands on some philosophical writings like Jean-Paul Sartre and made ready use of them'.⁵⁶ Biko found Sartre's work particularly stimulating in thinking through the concepts of freedom and responsibility.⁵⁷ Sartre had been a formative influence on Turner and there is no evidence that he shifted from the Sartrean standpoint. It was from Sartre's philosophical work that Turner had

⁵³ Halisi, *Black Political Thought*, 9.

⁵⁴ Morphet, 'A Biographical Introduction,' xix-xx. According to Turner's daughter, Jann, it was Biko who introduced Turner and Foszia. J. Turner, 'Rick Turner: 30 Years On,' *Mail and Guardian*, 21 December 2007 to 3 January 2008, 47.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Cited in M. More, 'Biko; African Existentialist Philosopher,' in Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives!*, 48.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

extrapolated a political philosophy, and he had returned to South Africa 'armed' with his doctorate, convinced in a sense by its own argument.⁵⁸

Mamphela Ramphele remembers that Turner used to visit the Alan Taylor residence and became friendly with all of the students there. She remembers how he 'spent long periods of time arguing with Steve about the analytical limitations of Black Consciousness, which a socialist perspective could remedy by adding a class analysis to address some of the complexities of power relations in South Africa'. According to Ramphele, 'Steve in turn pointed out to Rick that an economic class analysis which ignored the racist nature of capitalist exploitation in South Africa, and in many other parts of the globe, was itself inadequate. White workers identified more with white owners of capital than with black workers, Steve would conclude'. Ramphele notes how the debate would 'drift into a discussion of the false consciousness of white workers, ending with Steve challenging Rick to go out and conscientise white workers to prove that his approach would work in apartheid South Africa'.⁵⁹

Webster portrays the relationship in similar terms. Turner emphasised that it 'was not race' that 'explains the exploitation of the black worker, but the capitalist system'. 'Do not let your Blackness blind yourself to the fact that your power lies in the unorganized working class,' he would chide Biko.⁶⁰ As Webster points out, their interaction followed somewhat predictable lines, with Turner advocating the need for a class analysis. Biko's response to this position was best characterised in his Frank Talk article 'Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity' as 'Let them go to van Tonder in the Free State and tell him [that the situation is a class struggle rather than a racial one]'.⁶¹ In Biko's assessment the class analysis was adopted as a 'defence mechanism' by whites. As Biko put it:

A number of whites in this country adopt the class analysis, primarily because they want to detach us from anything relating to race. In case it has a rebound effect on them because they are white. This is the problem. So a lot of them adopt the class analysis as a defence mechanism and are persuaded of it because they find it more comfortable. And of course a number of them are terribly puritanical, dogmatic, and

⁵⁸ Morphet reflects that Turner was *unable* to give up the insights he had won through philosophical study, noting 'his refusal, or perhaps inability is a better description, to compromise the insights won in the philosophic study when faced by the South African reality'. Morphet, 'A Biographical Introduction,' xvi.

⁵⁹ Ramphele, *Across Boundaries*, 62.

⁶⁰ Webster, 'Moral Decay and Social Reconstruction,' 2.

⁶¹ Biko, *I Write*, 99.

very, very arrogant. They don't know quite to what extent they have to give up a part of themselves in order to be a true Marxist.⁶²

Biko's critique of the 'white left' went so far as to argue for a white 'liberal-left axis', which, while recognising that the rights of black people were being violated and that blacks needed to be 'brought up', failed to see that this necessarily entailed some of them 'coming down'. 'This was the problem' Biko reflected, 'We talk about that, and we get a whole lot of reaction and self-preservation mechanisms from them'.⁶³ Turner, though, did not fit Biko's picture of a puritanical and arrogant Marxist. Indeed, his humanism allowed him a breadth of thought such that he could be open to opposing ideas. As Maré reflected to me, 'Rick Turner's *type* of socialism was not a strict structural Marxism, it was a humanist Marxism'.⁶⁴

Webster's characterisation of the relationship between Biko and Turner hints at the importance each played in clarifying the terms of their counterparts' philosophy.⁶⁵ Both men called for the need for exactness in the meaning of key terms. As a professional philosopher, this was an abiding concern of Turner's, and he contended that misunderstandings were almost always associated with confusions over the definitions of key terms, especially where parties had different understandings of the terms of the debate.⁶⁶ Biko was similarly careful about the need to be clear about key definitions, concluding his paper to a leadership school at the end of 1971, by stressing 'again the need for us to know very clearly what we mean by certain terms and what our understanding is when we talk of Black Consciousness'.⁶⁷

In giving evidence at the SASO Nine trial, Turner mentioned how he had actively *studied* Black student politics:

I have certainly studied Black student politics as it has emerged partly through the Press, partly in terms of personal contact and meetings with Black student leaders, I have also in the past spoken at a number of Black campuses, I spoke for example at the University of Natal Black section, Alan Taylor residence. I gave a talk on Black

⁶² Gerhart, 'Interview with Steve Biko,' in Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives!*, 34.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Maré interview.

⁶⁵ The analytical tension between Turner's and Biko's positions is resonant of the debate between Frantz Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre, where Sartre dismissed negritude as 'a minor term in the dialectic,' whereas for Fanon, 'Black Consciousness... had to be understood as an absolute'. Gibson, 'Black Consciousness after Biko,' in Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives!*, 130.

⁶⁶ Turner papers, R. Turner, 'Memorandum to Commission of Inquiry into Certain Organisations,' 6.

⁶⁷ Biko, 'The Definition of Black Consciousness,' in Biko, *I Write*, 57.

Power there in I think 1970, during which I was able to have discussions of Black Power with SASO people who were in the audience.⁶⁸

In terms of his more personal relations, Turner mentioned his 'discussions with a number of SASO leaders on general questions of South African society, specifically in connection with SASO'. He noted that he had attended the opening of the third general student conference of SASO in Durban in 1971, as well as a seminar on the topic 'Black Consciousness and its relevance for Black Life', also held in Durban in 1971.⁶⁹

Turner was uniquely well placed with his deep grounding in philosophy and his exposure to New Left radical thought to be open to any ideas and to subject them to sustained critique; the use of the categories of 'blackness' and 'whiteness' by SASO activists was particularly problematic for him. Turner advanced 'important criticisms of the movement, especially its tendency to over-simplify and to absolutise' concepts.⁷⁰ He further appealed for the need of Black Consciousness activists to see different 'categories' of white South African, namely 'racist, liberal and radical'.⁷¹ He suggested that the analysis of SASO was 'confused by a very loose grasp of the concept "liberal"' and argued that there were black as well as white racists, and that there were black and white radicals. Black Consciousness was 'a form of radicalism' and Turner emphasised that, rather than demonising white liberals, the aim should be the creation of a new culture.⁷²

Both Biko and Turner were committed to the 'quest for a true humanity'.⁷³ It was what Turner had seen to be barred from the experience of white South Africans, amidst the trappings of material comfort; it was the 'the excitement of self-discovery, the excitement of shattered certainties, the thrill of freedom'.⁷⁴ Biko's and Turner's politics shared a glimpse of this liberated, moral vision, to which their respective doctrines and theoretical groundings provided the means. In their joint discussion, debate and friendship this shared sense of the liberation of the mind, gave them common ground for hope for a wider political liberation. Biko's vision from his first article, under the pseudonym 'Frank Talk', asserted that at 'the

⁶⁸ Turner papers, Supreme Court of South Africa, *The State versus S Cooper and Eight Others*, 3011.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 3012.

⁷⁰ Morphet, 'A Biographical Introduction', xix-xx.

⁷¹ Turner, 'Black Consciousness and White Liberals,' in Karis and Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence*, 429.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ S. Biko, 'Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity,' printed initially in Moore, *Black Theology: the South African Voice*. See also in Biko, *I Write*, 96-108.

⁷⁴ Turner, *The Eye of the Needle*, 92. Cited in Nash, 'The Moment of Western Marxism in South Africa,' 69.

heart of true integration is the provision for each man, each group to rise and attain the envisioned self'. This demanded that 'each group must be able to attain its style of existence without encroaching on or being thwarted by another'. It would be out of 'mutual respect for each other and complete freedom of self-determination' that a 'genuine fusion of the lifestyles of the various groups' could be achieved; this would be 'true integration'.⁷⁵

Biko and Turner approached their humanism from different standpoints. Turner was an atheist for whom God-talk was meaningless. Biko admitted no difficulty in believing in an omnipotent being, noting 'I am sufficiently convinced of the inadequacy of man and the rest of creation to believe that a greater force than mortals is responsible for creation, maintenance and continuation of life'.⁷⁶ Indeed, a sense of a religious calling was central to the way Biko understood and communicated his mission to others. The calling was rationalised by Biko through a particular understanding of its nature and implications. 'Obedience to God in the sense that I have accepted it is in fact at the heart of the conviction of most selfless revolutionaries,' he observed. 'It is a call to men of conscience to offer themselves and sometimes their lives for the eradication of evil'.⁷⁷

Biko's relationship with Turner was evocative of his later and much more publicised friendship with Donald Woods, after Biko was banned to King William's Town in 1973. Woods described the bond as a 'deep friendship,' 'that went beyond considerations,' 'a personal relationship among people drawn to each other as compatible human beings'.⁷⁸ Biko converted Woods to the Black Consciousness, and there was an Eastern Cape 'moment' as well, where activists grouped around Biko in King Williams Town engaged in community development programmes and sought to resist increasing state repression.⁷⁹ But the timing of Biko's and Turner's engagement was more critical, as it was in the early 1970s, that activists refined Black Consciousness's intellectual position. When Biko was banned and restricted to the Eastern Cape, his own role changed from student organiser and SASO publications officer in Durban to that of community development. While Woods was profoundly influenced by Biko personally, and also reports having changed some of Biko's political views

⁷⁵ Biko, *I Write*, 22.

⁷⁶ Wilson, 'Biko: A Life,' 43.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Woods, *Biko*, 58. Woods dedicated his book *Biko* to the close group of activists that he knew, who were members of the BCM and the Christian Institute, including among his friends Mamphela Ramphele, Thenjiwe Mtintso, Malusi Mpumlwana, Beyers Naudé, Theo Kotze, Cedric Mayson, Peter Jones and Aelred Stubbs.

⁷⁹ For a new study of Black Consciousness community development programmes, see Hadfield, 'Restoring Human Dignity and Building Self-Reliance'.

in their discussions,⁸⁰ the friendship did not have the political or philosophical significance that Biko's earlier friendship with Turner possessed, where both Turner and Biko had operated as public intellectuals at the peak of their influence. Whereas the Eastern Cape and King William's Town did become a centre for Black Consciousness activists with Biko's banning, the emphasis shifted from critique to action, as the student-activists matured and sought new roles beyond student politics.

The Development of SASO in Durban

Turner's challenge to Black Consciousness, for the need to 'create a new culture,' drew on the counter-cultural movement of the 1960s. In an interview, Afrikaans-speaking student activist, Gerhard (Gerry) Maré, recalled how in his student days the university became the scene of an 'odd alliance' between hippies, radical sports people and the 'politicos' who 'would come together around particular protests against the vice-chancellor [or] whatever'. 'So just in terms of student politics,' he reflected, 'there was an incredible movement of different things'.⁸¹ The ferment around the university was further translated into concrete political action. With a group of hardcore student activists, Turner helped to set up the Student Wages Commission in Durban, which used the latest sociological research to formulate the 'poverty datum line'. Grace Davie shows that the use of this statistical measurement, enabled students to challenge white South African society as to the exploitative labour policies of Durban companies, as well as gathering evidence to help politicise Durban's black workers, specifically the dockworkers at Durban harbour. In her analysis of the Wages Commission, Davie is not able to come to a certain conclusion as to the students' role, noting the 'considerable extent to which students' voices intermingled with workers' voices'. She does recognise, though, the 'dramatic ways in which intellectuals, students and workers confronted race and class oppression'.⁸²

Biko and SASO were also highly active at the time. They had set up an office in Beatrice Street, in downtown Durban. From their office, SASO published a regular newsletter with the aim of introducing ideas and generating debate on black campuses. The newsletter was a central medium of communication. As we have seen, in 1972, Spro-cas 2

⁸⁰ Woods, 'Arguments and Discussions,' *Biko*, 106-13.

⁸¹ Maré interview.

⁸² Davie, 'Strength in Numbers,' 419-20.

took form as the Black Community Programmes (BCP), aimed at micro-level development among the black community. In 1973, the Black Workers Project was set up and an independent trade union, the Black Allied Workers Union, was launched under Drake Koka.

Although Biko denied there was any reason for locating the SASO headquarters in Durban, brushing the fact aside as ‘just a historical aberration,’ he acknowledged that Durban was not the typical South African city, zoned with a white central business district and the outskirts for ‘non-whites’. In Durban, Biko acknowledged, ‘there is this whole meeting ground of this half of town. It is supposed to be an Indian area, and it is accessible therefore to all groups. There are no restrictions attached to Africans regarding Indian areas’.⁸³ SASO was able to sub-let offices in Beatrice Street from Howard Trumbull, a treasurer of the Congregationalist American Board Mission, without the need for official permission.⁸⁴

SASO’s attention to its national image and its investment in circulating reading material, allowed critical observers to actively monitor the development of its discourse. Turner studied ‘the SASO newsletter, and... SASO associated publications like Creativity and Black Development, and Black Theology’.⁸⁵ Indeed for an organisation advocating polarisation, it is striking that much attention was devoted to ‘communication models’ in SASO seminars and conferences. Although ‘communication’ was ostensibly limited to the Black community, there was ready access given for those who wished to explore the movement. The aims of SASO Newsletter were given as: establishing ‘proper contact amongst the various black campuses’ and the black community; stimulating debate on ‘current matters of topical interest’; to foreground ‘black opinion on matters affecting blacks in South Africa’; to ‘make known the stand taken by students in matters affecting their lives on and off campus’; to ‘examine relevant philosophical approaches to South Africa’s

⁸³ Gerhart, ‘Interview with Steve Biko,’ in Mngxitama et al, *Biko Lives!*, 36.

⁸⁴ American Board Mission minister and Congregational Church of Southern Africa treasurer, Howard Trumbull, rented an empty upstairs room in the church offices at Beatrice Street to SASO, which he was able to do as the treasurer without permission from the church authorities. He had been involved with Alan Paton and the Defence and Aid Fund in Natal from 1966. His son, David Trumbull, attended Natal University for two years, met and spoke with Biko at the campus in 1969 and was involved in student politics there. Dave recalls being asked by Biko if he was aware of any space that could be used by SASO, and, although he does not remember clearly, Howard maintains that Dave referred Biko to him. Dave remembers playing Malcolm X recordings he possessed at a UCM conference that Biko and black students also attended. He was also involved with Turner’s project, which canvassed Durban’s white population about the ramifications of South Africa’s anti-terrorist legislation and the loss of civil liberties. He recalls finding the film *Ten Days that Shook the World* as an 8mm film in a small local film shop and presented the film to an audience at Wentworth residence, which included students from the medical school and Turner. The family were deported by the government in 1971. Howard Trumbull, Skype interview with author, 04 June 2010. David Trumbull, Skype interview with author, 02 June 2010.

⁸⁵ Turner papers, Supreme Court of South Africa, *The State versus S Cooper and Eight Others*, 3011.

problems; and centrally, to ‘contribute in the formulation of a viable and strong feeling of self-reliance and consciousness amongst the black people of South Africa’.⁸⁶

Although these aims were limited to generating black solidarity, the *SASO Newsletter* also created a national profile that was accessible to both white and black observers. The newsletter provided a medium for the crystallisation and translation of an otherwise nebulous and emotional appeal to a ‘black consciousness’. Recent commentators have observed that ‘Black Consciousness intellectuals made use of the *SASO Newsletter*, which was the major means of communicating the Black Consciousness message from 1970 until mid-1973’. At its peak they note that the *SASO Newsletter* appeared four or five times a year and that its circulation reached 4,000 copies, not counting its hand-to-hand circulation.⁸⁷

Wilson also notes that ‘SASO became a sub-culture of the university’. Malusi Mpumlwana emphasised how when he arrived at UNNE it was the warmth and camaraderie of the SASO group that attracted him. They read widely outside of their curriculum and this intellectual searching ‘provided the essence of the debates, and the discussions that made the future have some kind of meaningful possibility’.⁸⁸ The intense dialogue, reading and distillation of ideas that occurred at the Alan Taylor residence and further afield were crucial in redressing the floundering intellectual self-confidence in black students. Biko had noted after his tour of black campuses in 1971 that ‘most of the students, while very sure of what they did not like... lacked a depth of insight into what can be done. One found wherever he went the question being asked repeatedly “where do we go from here?”’ Biko considered the situation to be a ‘tragic result’ of ‘the old approach, where the blacks were made to fit into a pattern largely and often wholly, determined by white students’. As a result ‘our originality and imagination have been dulled to the point where it takes a supreme effort to act logically even in order to follow one’s beliefs and convictions’.⁸⁹ Seeking to redress this situation involved an active search for intellectual resources, from thinkers from the African Diaspora, such as Cabral and Senghor, to Fanon. In response, for instance, to Gail Gerhart’s question as to the intellectual origins of the Black Consciousness movement, Biko asserted that ‘it wasn’t a question of one thing out of a book and discovering that it’s interesting’. Rather it

⁸⁶ *SASO Newsletter*, 1, 1 (May 1971), 21.

⁸⁷ Mzamane and Howarth, ‘Representing Blackness,’ 187.

⁸⁸ Wilson, ‘Biko: A Life,’ in Pityana et al., *Bounds of Possibility*, 28.

⁸⁹ Biko, *I Write*, 19.

was ‘also an active search for that type of book, for the kind of thing that will say things to you, that was bound to evoke a response’.⁹⁰

Confrontational Politics and Community Development in Durban

In March 1969, UND students Halton Cheadle, Dave Hemson, Jennifer Brown and Veronica Vorster were ejected from a meeting at the Alan Taylor residence called to discuss the formation of SASO. They were greeted at the door with the ironical ‘Hello Baas, Hello Missus!’ and referred to in the meeting as ‘intruders’ and ‘foreigners’. They left the meeting after being accused of being Security Branch spies.⁹¹ Hemson had no doubt about the reason for their treatment, and he argued it ‘reflected the new spirit of black consciousness’. White student leaders were initially shocked at the increasingly radical tone of their black counterparts. As Pityana remembered, ‘when you hear Ranwedzi Nengwekhulu, addressing a crowd wild with excitement squatting on a rugby field at the Alan Taylor Residence, you’d imagine you were listening to Malcolm X himself’.⁹² Many of the young SASO activists battled to maintain the nuances of distinguishing between ‘white racism as a system to be fought and white people who may be innocent bystanders in a racist society’.⁹³ But even those whites who saw themselves as ‘anti-apartheid’ were a potential threat.

In one bitter experience, Mamphela Ramphele blamed Turner for wrecking the work of SASO at the New Farm Settlement Project. Malusi Mpumlwana, the chairperson of the University of Natal SASO committee, had been in charge of the project, working with the squatters at New Farm near the Phoenix settlement, to improve their housing and provide them with running water. The emphasis had been on encouraging dialogue and initiative with the squatters in New Farm. As Ramphele reflects, the black students felt they had achieved a breakthrough when they were able to get each household to agree to contribute R2 to the provision of clean tap water. SASO agreed to cover the deficit. But, ‘matters went awry when

⁹⁰ Gerhart, ‘Interview with Steve Biko,’ in Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives!*, 24.

⁹¹ ‘Black Power – Students Forced to Leave Meeting,’ *Dome* (University of Natal) 27 March 1969, in Karis and Gerhart, *Nadir and Resurgence*, 458-9.

⁹² N. Pityana, ‘Afro-American influences on the Black Consciousness Movement’. Address to conference on Afro-American inter-relationships with Southern Africa, African Studies and Research Program, Howard University, Washington D.C., Howard University, 27 May 1979, 10. Found at: www.aluka.org (accessed 19 March 2008).

⁹³ Ramphele, *Across Boundaries*, 65.

a group of mainly young white activists, under the leadership of Richard Turner' arrived.⁹⁴ The white activists were prepared to pay for the costs of installing the tap water in total, thus negating the spirit of self-help that the SASO activists had worked hard to create. In Ramphele's judgement, it was 'as though the poverty of the New Farm residents offered a scarce resource, accessible to Natal University activists, for which they competed to test their ideals of community development'.⁹⁵

The damage done by the insensitive course of action confirmed 'BC fears of white domination'. It was more distressing because 'Turner had up to that point been regarded by Black Consciousness activists as one of the few white radicals who understood their views about white racism and economic domination'.⁹⁶ Ramphele was more scathing in her autobiography, calling Turner's interference at New Farm 'the height of insensitivity,' commenting '[i]f ever there was a case of Black Consciousness needing to stand up to white people, one couldn't have written a better script than this one'.⁹⁷ Part of the refining of Black Consciousness was learning to work with and make use of the resources offered by white activists, but not to be used by them in turn.⁹⁸ Biko needed to mediate between Turner and the angry SASO activists, who saw their interference at New Farm as an overt sign of white arrogance.

The Eye of the Needle *and Black Consciousness*

Richard Turner's *The Eye of the Needle* is a seminal work of political thinking on South Africa. In a context of increasing political repression, he advocated a form of democratic socialism, inspired by a Sartrean emphasis on the significance of individual choice. As recently as 2004, the book has been used as 'an optic with which to view the kind of society that has been established in the country since [the democratic elections of] 1994'.⁹⁹ Tony

⁹⁴ M. Ramphele, 'Empowerment and Symbols of Hope: Black Consciousness and Community Development', in Pityana et al., *Bounds of Possibility*, 158.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Ramphele, *Across Boundaries*, 63.

⁹⁸ As Mzamane, Maaba and Biko put it: 'BC was striving, in fact, to develop a unique organisational philosophy and set of strategies not only on how to stand on one's own feet but also how to work with other people without being used by them.' in M. V. Mzamane, B. Maaba and N. Biko, 'The Black Consciousness Movement,' in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2, 1970-1980*, 100.

⁹⁹ T. Fluxman and P. Vale, 'Re-reading Rick Turner in the New South Africa,' *International Relations*, 18, 2 (2004), 173-189.

Morphet notes in his biographical introduction, that in the 1970s ‘the South African state authorities clearly identified the book as a work of theory which had exercised strong influence on opposition thinking since its publication’.¹⁰⁰ Morphet reflects that his own name had become known to many people through his introduction, suspecting ‘[the *Eye*] has a substantial hand to hand circulation’ and observing that most of those who knew him from the book ‘have been Black’.¹⁰¹ Anthony Marx writes, in a footnote to his section ‘Debates and Transitions Within Black Consciousness,’ that between 1975 and the uprising of June 1976 Turner’s book was ‘among the new ideas discussed in SASO’.¹⁰²

The book was discussed earlier in fact; in *Black Review 1973* editor and poet, Mafika Pascal Gwala, noted that the book had stimulated ‘much thinking in the Black youth [and] reaction to it was varied and controversial’.¹⁰³ In the spirit of Black Consciousness, the editor emphasised, however, that Blacks were a critical audience. He juxtaposed Turner’s contribution with the publication, the following year, of *Being-Black-in-the World* (1973) by the clinical psychologist, Chabani Manganyi, and published under the auspices of Sprocas/Ravan Press. Gwala argued that Manganyi’s publication ‘showed further impetus in the Black’s wanting more to argue their case dialectically and therefore from an objective and more basic stand-point’. Things had changed and now the ‘system of reference’ was no longer ‘based on white terms of reference but on Black terms’.¹⁰⁴ Gwala’s reservations about *The Eye* reflected his preoccupation with a search for ‘Black terms,’ and an aversion to ‘white’ standards. Although he conceded that Blacks saw the need for the fundamental socio-economic change envisaged in *The Eye of the Needle*, Black Consciousness leaders qualified the book’s remit by arguing that ‘the only people who had a genuine interest and commitment to this objective were the victims of the system’.¹⁰⁵

Gwala indicated that, although Turner’s book pointed in the right direction, its utopian solution occluded ‘the true perspective of the developments in the country which could be misleading to the average Black in the face of historic, social, economic and political reality in South Africa’. The danger was to fall back on the utopian analysis presented by

¹⁰⁰ Morphet, ‘A Biographical Introduction,’ vii.

¹⁰¹ Richard Turner Papers, letter from T. Morphet to Glenn Moss, 8 February 1995.

¹⁰² Marx, *Lessons of Struggle*, 74.

¹⁰³ M.P. Gwala (ed.), *Black Review 1973* (Durban: Black Community Programmes, 1973), 178.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Buthelezi, ‘The Black consciousness movement in South Africa in the late 1960s,’ 28.

Turner, without adequately grasping the structurally constrained position from which he was arguing. Thus the ‘criticism from Black Consciousness circles was that Blacks were by now quite aware that [a] radical stance was one thing and radical action quite another thing. Only Blacks could move into solidified action, not the whites – by virtue of their privileged position’.¹⁰⁶ In short, Turner’s contribution was stimulating but also potentially misleading, as it could distract Blacks from the task at hand.

The critique of white norms and the influence of philosophical scepticism on SASO can be traced back to the United States. The theme of SASO’s third General Student’s Council, held at the Catholic St. Peter’s Seminary at Hammanskraal from 2 to 9 July 1972, was ‘Creativity and Black Development’. SASO invited an African American academic, Robert C. Williams, to give the keynote speech on ‘The Political, Social, Philosophical Implications of Creativity and Black Development’. Williams’s address was drawn from a symposium held in the United States, at an annual conference on Philosophy and Black Experience, at Morgan State College, Baltimore, Maryland, earlier in 1972. Williams, a lecturer in religion at Vassar College in New York (not to be confused with Robert F. Williams, one of the American South’s ‘most dynamic race rebels’¹⁰⁷) was not able to deliver the address, but his paper was printed along with the conference materials. Williams argued for a relativistic interpretation of value systems, arguing that ‘Contrary to what many European philosophers have taught, special group interests have played and will always play a major role in the formulation of philosophies and systems of value... The big lie of the modern Western tradition is that there is such a thing as objectivity and a ‘value free’ inquiry’.¹⁰⁸

The SASO Nine Trial and Turner’s Defence

In 1974 SASO planned to stage a celebration rally at Currie’s Fountain in Durban, to celebrate the independence of Mozambique from Portuguese rule.¹⁰⁹ The day before the rally was due to commence, Minister of Police, Jimmy Kruger, told parliament it had been banned. SASO refused to back down and printed thousands of leaflets advertising the march.

¹⁰⁶ Gwala, *Black Review* 1973, 182.

¹⁰⁷ T. Tyson, ‘Robert F. Williams, “Black Power,” and the Roots of the African American Freedom Struggle,’ *The Journal of American History*, 85, 2 (1998), 541.

¹⁰⁸ B. J. Langa (ed.), *Creativity and Black Development* (Durban: SASO Publications, 1973), 13.

¹⁰⁹ For a close consideration of the significance of the pro-Frelimo rally see Brown, ‘Public Protest and Violence in South Africa, 1948 – 1976’.

An estimated 5 000 people converged on Currie's Fountain only to be met with police and dogs. The rally was brutally broken up when the dogs were set on the assembled people. Matching the demonstrations in Durban, students also held a rally at Turfloop on 25 September 1974, following its annual SASO week.¹¹⁰ Militant slogans and posters were placed on the road to the entrance of the university, such as 'Frelimo fought and regained our soil, our dignity. It is a story. Change the name and the story applies to YOU'; 'Revolution!! Machel will Help! Away with Vorster Ban! We are not Afro Black Power!!!'¹¹¹ Following the discretion of the university Rector, the university authorities waited until the arrival of a large contingent of police before removing the placards. The support for the rally and the rejection of white education expressed there, caused sufficiently grave concern for Prime Minister Vorster to appoint Justice J.H. Synman to head a Commission of Inquiry into the cause of the unrest, which Vorster judged be in the interests of all the black universities.¹¹² The Commission found SASO to be primarily responsible for the agitation and virtually coterminous with the Turfloop SRC, as it observed that after 1969 a 'period of unprecedented unrest' had broken out at the university.¹¹³

An estimated 37 activists were detained under South Africa's anti-terrorist legislation after the Frelimo Rallies.¹¹⁴ Nine SASO activists were formally prosecuted for their role in organising the march, namely: Saths Cooper, Zithulele Cindi, Mosioua Lekota, Aubrey Mokoape, Strini Moodley, Muntu Myeza, Pandelani Nefolovhodwe, Nkwenkwe Nkomo, and Kaborane Sedibe.¹¹⁵ Their lengthy prosecution became known as the 'SASO Nine trial'. Gail Gerhart writes of the trial:

Aware that the eyes of the country were on them, the accused used the trial to restate the nationalist viewpoint, and took every opportunity to symbolize their defiance of the state by singing freedom songs and raising clenched fists in the courtroom. Thus, instead of contributing to the suppression of Black Consciousness ideology, the trial,

¹¹⁰ Wolfson, *Turmoil at Turfloop*, 26.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹¹² J.G.E. Wolfson, *Turmoil at Turfloop: A Summary of the Reports of the Synman and Jackson Commissions of Inquiry into the University of the North* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1976), 3.

¹¹³ Wolfson, *Turmoil at Turfloop*, 15.

¹¹⁴ Institute of Commonwealth Studies Library, London [hereafter ICS], 6/2/12, Mary Benson Papers, 2nd Report on Arrests, Detentions and Trials of Members and Supporters of South African Students Organisation, Black People's Convention, Black Allied Workers Union, Theatre Council of Natal, Black Community Programmes. Issued by the Program for Social Change, 23 December 1974.

¹¹⁵ Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, 299.

by giving the accused a continuous public platform through the press, merely disseminated that ideology even more widely, and held up to youth once again a model of 'rebel' courage.¹¹⁶

Prominent among the witnesses for the defence were Biko and Turner. Biko's defence formed the basis of the book, *The Testimony of Steve Biko* (1978), edited by Millard Arnold. Arnold drew attention to the importance of Biko's brilliant exposition and defence, similarly showing how the trial became a crucial public platform for the dissemination of Black Consciousness. Turner's defence at the trial in 1976, three years after his banning, has not received much attention, although as this section will argue, it was revealing as it provided insight and reflection on his preceding six years of activism. Although outside the ambit of what activists remember the 'Durban Moment' to be, Turner's defence highlights his close knowledge of SASO and, as a postscript to this chapter, sheds light on the space that existed for intercommunicative reason between activists.¹¹⁷

Turner was called as the first witness for the defence. As it emerged, part of his strategy was to challenge the prosecution's expert witness, Stoffel Van der Merwe, a Senior Lecturer in Politics at the Rand Afrikaans Universiteit, on his use of SASO and BPC documents out of their original context. According to Turner, the prosecution had not distinguished between 'policy documents' and 'reactive' documents. They had also failed to make the distinction between organisational discussion and concrete policy decisions, and had not taken into account the relative importance of documents in relation to each other. Van Der Merwe had used SASO documents, seized by the Security Branch, to try and establish 'a framework of theory which would identify features of black consciousness ideology likely to lead to revolution, which could be used to measure the revolutionary nature of BPC and SASO'.¹¹⁸ He presented a theory, which he argued 'had diagnostic value to predict and identify a revolutionary group'. As Michal Lobban points out, this was the

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 298.

¹¹⁷ At the same time Turner was witness, the Afrikaans poet and dissident, Breyten Breytenbach, was being tried in the adjoining courtroom for treason on account of his involvement with the secret ANC-aligned organisation, *Obkela*. Breytenbach writes: 'Once, on my way in.... I caught a glimpse of Rick Turner's red beard, sitting alone in the SASO court,' quoted in Nash, 'The Dialectical Tradition in South Africa,' 208. More importantly, Nash draws out important parallels between Breytenbach and Turner's personal journeys and their thinking in which the dialectic was a central and significant theme.

¹¹⁸ Lobban, *White Man's Justice*, 55.

‘necessary crux of his evidence’ because Black Consciousness organisations had assiduously avoided overtly revolutionary activity.¹¹⁹

In response to Van der Merwe’s diagnostic model, Turner presented his own collection of Black Consciousness material. He distinguished, however, between the policy documents of the General Student Council, its branch reports and occasional publications, and the speeches by individual members. Evidently these could not be accorded the same importance: ‘One cannot treat these all on exactly the same level of analysis,’ he argued, ‘one has to categorise one’s documents... and then weigh each document in the light of its position in the overall organisation’.¹²⁰ SASO/BPC documents needed to be weighed-up and read alongside a proper analysis of the organisation. This required close knowledge and sensitivity in judgement, which the court’s legal, document-based, approach did not fulfil. Moreover, there was a danger that language itself could be misleading. Drawing on the latest linguistic, anthropological and social psychology material available, Turner argued that political language needed to be understood in terms of its specific context. Quoting from Edelman, he reminded the court that ‘The realistic study of political language and its meaning is necessarily a probing not only of dictionaries nor of word counts, but of diverse responses to particular modes of expression of audiences in disparate social settings’.¹²¹ Thus, he concluded, that qualification and further research was required for a proper understanding of ‘Black use of language, Black perceptions, Black use of ideas in South Africa’.¹²² He cited the example of Nkwenkwe Nkomo, one of the accused, whose background was in the Evangelical Churches, and whose speeches tended towards a robust, bellicose form of expression associated with the fiery preaching of his church background. It was thus evident that the qualifications of the prosecution to render a fair and nuanced assessment of the reality of SASO, and therefore the culpability of the accused, were inadequate.

Turner also emphasised how SASO always focused its activities within prescribed ‘legal’ parameters and called for qualification on the charge, levelled by the prosecution, that SASO was seeking a regime change. Rather, Turner pointed out that SASO accepted ‘certain regime norms and values’ such as freedom of speech and freedom of association, but were ‘operating and using these aspects of regime norms and values in criticising other aspects of

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 56

¹²⁰ Turner Papers, Supreme Court of South Africa, *The State versus S Cooper and Eight Others*, 3015.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 3020.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 3022.

the way in which the regime functions'.¹²³ 'A point which strikes me over and over again in attempting to interpret this,' he emphasised, 'is that their political activity has... always aimed at finding within the existing regime methods of activity, and in that sense they are saying: look, this regime gives us scope for doing certain things, but we don't want all aspect of the regime we clearly want some change but we have scope within the regime for working for changes in other aspects of the regime'. It was incorrect to assert, as the prosecution did, that SASO was rejecting the entire regime; if that were the case the most rational course of action would be to go underground and 'attempt to use violence'.¹²⁴ Turner asserted the crucial point from his analysis of the documentation, that where violent imagery may occur it 'did not reach the level of policy and become the policy of the organisation'.¹²⁵

Turner and the other expert members of the defence, such as Professor Robert Gurr, were highly successful in destroying the credibility of the diagnostic model proposed by Van Der Merwe. In his interim ruling, the judge, Boshoff J., was forced to concede that a distinction needed to be drawn between a revolutionary and a protest group, 'which might overlap in terms of objectives, organization, and tactics, but which differed in strategies and demands'. He recognised that 'revolutionary groups demand the destruction of the existing political, economic and social system' and worked in secret, and thus did not use demonstrations and strikes, as SASO and BPC had done.¹²⁶

Despite the success of the expert defence, the court was able to prosecute the accused on the charge of promoting racial hostility.¹²⁷ While the central contention of the defence was that 'the language and content of SASO and BPC documents cannot be understood without an appreciation of the reality experienced from day to day by the black community', Lobban shows that the prosecution was able to discount the 'black world,' as represented by the defence, and trivialise the disempowerment of Blacks in South Africa. The expert witness of Turner and Gurr was sidestepped by the prosecution, as they argued that Van der Merwe's model could not be viewed 'bit by bit' but needed to be taken as 'a

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 3037.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3038. Turner's analysis closely matches Barney Pityana's assessment of the strategy of Black Consciousness in his essay 'Revolution Within the Law?', in Pityana et al., *Bounds of Possibility*, 201 – 212, where he regrets the political naiveté of attempting to work within the law to achieve political change viewing the strategy as inherently constrained.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 3174.

¹²⁶ Lobban, *White Man's Justice*, 60.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

whole'.¹²⁸ The unique nature of the trial, as Lobban notes, was that it prosecuted ideas rather than actions, and the SASO Nine were eventually convicted due to the revolutionary *potential* of their ideas.

Turner's defence gave insight into the dynamics of the early 1970s. It showed that he had engaged with Black Consciousness intellectually and that he understood its aims and goals. His defence indicated also that he identified with Black Consciousness, which he recognised as a 'form of radicalism.' There were congruencies with his own view, as he emphasised consciousness and strategic change within the confines of the law. His own study of Black Consciousness, and his personal engagement with Biko and SASO leaders, thus enabled Turner to mount an effective defence in the SASO Trial.

Conclusions

The Durban Moment occurred in a unique context where activists drew on traditions of democratic thought, often making recourse to notions of transcendent values to which a political vision and political praxis could be examined.¹²⁹ In the case of Biko and the Black Consciousness activists, this entailed, on the one hand, a reinterpretation of African nationalist traditions, Black American thought and the postcolonial critique of the 'Third World'. In the instance of white students, congregated around Turner, it took the shape of an appeal to the values of Western civilization, the New Left critique of capitalist society and tapping into the spaces of South Africa's dialectical tradition. This moment of re-evaluation and exploration, unlike the later Eastern Cape 'moment' of Woods and Biko, extended beyond Durban to influence thinking in Spro-cas, as well as providing impetus for greater contextual theological revaluation, in the form of Black Theology centres. The Black Consciousness 'othering' of white liberals played a role in refining their political discourse, but it also created a space for meaningful engagement with those who were willing to go beyond the liberal paradigm. Turner, a young white South African who had left the country to study abroad, departed a liberal but returned changed, with a broader political consciousness, a move that was concretised and formalised by his contacts with Biko and the SASO students in Durban.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹²⁹ Eddie Webster regretted that this clear, radical vision was subsequently lost in the nineties, Webster, 'Moral Decay and Social Reconstruction'.

Black Consciousness was the fruit of the intellectual labour of blacks alone, but it was also a political body of ideas that arose out of a political context that was shaped by many forces, emanating from both white and black sources. Although the rhetorical force of the discourse was levelled against white liberal interference, this did not summarily end all contact or prevent fruitful dialogue. The chapter calls for the need for thinking in terms of the intellectual history of South Africa, not seeing Black Consciousness solely in terms of a political organisation (as significant as that is) but as a body of ideas developed in the South African context, with comparative appeal to other political ideologies.

*C o n c l u s i o n**The Creation of a New Culture*

Turner's response to Black Consciousness sensed the political possibilities in its radicalism; but in his view, the correct focus was a positive affirmation of persons and the creation of a new culture that affirmed their dignity, rather than a negative rejection of white liberalism. He saw the significance of radical thought in its embodiment of a rejection of capitalism and apartheid, which was congruent with the demands of full citizenship and equality of black South Africans.¹ A new political model was called for, one that rejected avarice and consumerism and embraced instead a 'Christian model' based on genuine community and love. But events overtook Biko's and Turner's debates and efforts that strove for a new culture; achieved partly, for Biko, through black self-reliance and, for both men, facilitated by a change in consciousness.

Steve Biko died on 12 September 1977. He had been brutally assaulted in police detention in Port Elizabeth's Sanlam Building, and was then driven 1200 km to Pretoria with brain damage in the back of a police van, and died in the city. The Minister for Police, Jimmy Kruger, famously responded to the news of Biko's death at the Transvaal National Party Congress with the words, 'Dit laat my koud' ('It leaves me cold').² Almost four months later to the day, Turner was murdered at his home on Dalton Avenue, Bellair, in Durban. He was shot through the window by an unknown assassin and died in the arms of his oldest daughter, Jann. Opposition forces had lost their two key intellectuals within the space of less than half a year. The state banned seventeen Black Consciousness organisations on 17 October 1977, two weeks after the funeral of Biko, and effectively crushed SASO, BPC and the community development initiatives established under the BCP. The state confiscated the assets of the BCP, destroyed the leather working factor at Njwaxa and took over the Zanempilo health clinic.³ After the conclusion of the SASO Nine trial the accused, among them Strini Moodley, were sentenced to a minimum of five years in prison on Robben Island. Barney Pitso and his wife, Dimza, left South Africa in 1978 for exile, where he worked as a parish priest in London, and then as Director of the WCC's Programme to

¹ R. Turner, 'In Search of a New South Africa,' *Pro Veritate*, 9, 5 (15 September 1970), 3-8.

² Woods, *Biko*, 166.

³ Hadfield, 'Biko, Black Consciousness and the System eZinyoka,' 95.

Combat Racism in Geneva. Beyers Naudé was banned in 1977 along with the Christian Institute. Donald Woods escaped the country on New Year's Eve 1978.

The wave of bannings and the murders perpetrated by the state occurred in the aftermath of an upwelling of popular revolt, sparked when the Soweto schoolchildren marched on 16 June 1976,⁴ and signalled that apartheid was firmly on the defensive. The state's action against SASO, BPC and the Christian Institute aimed to destroy the broad base of interlinked progressive activism that had coalesced from the late 1960s and through the course of the 1970s. Black Consciousness had been central to the modulated political rhetoric and analysis that undergirded this alignment of South African civil society to a co-ordinated oppositional stance against apartheid. The final issue of *Pro Veritate*, for September 1977, featured a full-sized portrait of Biko on its front cover. The editor and member of the Christian Institute, Cedric Mayson, reflected: the 'martyrdom' of Biko had revealed the real nature and 'true circumstances' of apartheid South Africa. Biko's martyrdom cut 'through the fog of confused thinking and muddled motives' and showed that the government sought to impose 'white domination' with 'power and violence'. His murder, further, clearly showed that apartheid was an evil ideology, an ideology that could not be reformed but could only be rejected. Black Consciousness had been acknowledged by members in all races as a central and authentic component in the search for the 'fullness of humanity and liberation which Christ proclaimed'.⁵ Reinier Holst, editor of the Christian Institute's Natal regional newsletter, agreed. Biko was a radical, '- yes,' but 'always in dialogue with those white people who sincerely grappled with their role in a changing political scene'.⁶

The murder of Biko at the hands of the apartheid state released a wave of international condemnation, occurring close after the Soweto Uprising the year before, and galvanised the United Nations to impose 'a mandatory arms embargo' on South Africa.⁷ Biko's funeral in King William's Town on 25 September 1977 was the largest and most publicised Black Consciousness public event to that date, as 20 000 mourners converged on

⁴ For discussions see A. Brooks, and J. Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm: The Origins and Development of the Uprising in Soweto and the rest of South Africa from June to December 1976* (London: International Defence and Aid Fund for South Africa, 1980); and S. Ndlovu, *The Soweto Uprisings: Counter-memories of June 1976* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1998).

⁵ C. Mayson, 'Steve Biko,' in *Pro Veritate*, 16, 5 (September 1977), 2.

⁶ Killie Campbell Africana Library, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, Uncatalogued Manuscripts, Christian Institute of Southern Africa, *Natal Regional Newsletter*, 4 (1977), 1.

⁷ D. Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God: South Africa's victory over apartheid* (London, New York, Toronto, Sydney and Auckland: Doubleday, 1994), 16.

the town for the ceremony under the banner of the BPC.⁸ Representatives of the United States and other Western governments also attended. The Anglican Bishop of Lesotho, Desmond Tutu, addressed the funeral, having returned to South Africa from Lesotho on news of Biko's death.

In his address, Tutu pronounced a benediction on Biko and Black Consciousness. Tutu compared the life and death of Biko with that of Christ. 'We too, like the disciples of Jesus, have been stunned by the death of another young man in his thirties'. Biko had been a 'young man completely dedicated to the pursuit of justice and righteousness, of peace and reconciliation. A young man completely committed to radical change in our beloved land'. God had called Biko 'to be his servant in South Africa' as the 'founder father' of the Black Consciousness Movement. It was, Tutu unhesitatingly affirmed, a movement of God that 'sought to awaken in the black person a sense of his intrinsic value and worth,' 'not needing to apologise for his existential condition as a black person'. Black Consciousness was essential and was the grounds for true reconciliation to be possible.⁹

In retrospect, Tutu's public address at Biko's funeral symbolised that the mantle of leadership in the internal struggle against apartheid had been passed on. He was made General Secretary of the SACC in March 1978, a position from which he increasingly led the civil society resistance of the 1980s.¹⁰ He was in attendance at the launch of the Azanian Peoples Organization (AZAPO) in Soweto in April 1978.¹¹ The following year activists launched the Azanian Students Organisation as well as the Congress of South African Students. But the loss of Turner and Biko were severe blows for the type of political engagement that had characterised the 1970s. Their importance stemmed from their leadership as much as their ideas. In an interview trade unionist and lawyer, Halton Cheadle, wistfully remarked that Turner could have influenced the *nature* of the debate of the 1980s, not necessarily by fundamentally altering the politics of the moment, which would be beyond any human to do, but by ensuring a more rational discussion that valued clarity of thought and goals.¹² Black Consciousness after 1977 also lacked the breadth of Biko's intellect and his

⁸ Magaziner, *The Law and the Prophets*, 183.

⁹ Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God*, 19 – 20.

¹⁰ For histories see T. Lodge and B. Nasson (eds.), *All, here, and now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s* (Cape Town, David Philip 1991); and J. Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983 - 1991* (Cape Town: David Philip; Oxford: James Currey; Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000).

¹¹ Gibson, 'Black Consciousness after Biko,' in Mngxitama et al., *Biko Lives!*, 137.

¹² H. Cheadle interviewed in J. Turner, 'My Father, Rick Turner'.

personal openness. What Biko left behind was his political analysis and his abiding and powerful memory but these were poor substitutes for Biko himself.

Speaking at Turner's memorial service in Durban at St. Anthony's Hall, where a crowd of 'about 1000 awaited the arrival of the family at the hall',¹³ Tony Morphet remembered Turner's 'charismatic power to move people to action' and how he had offered an 'intellectual challenge and an emotional challenge,' which impelled people to revalue their lives and opened 'perspectives to new ways of living'.¹⁴ Theologian, Manas Buthelezi, called it a day where South Africa had to 'ask herself' some 'fundamental questions'. South Africa needed more, not fewer, people like Turner, who were prepared to identify with those different in colour and 'in political circumstance'. The day would come, he prophesied, when South Africa would be confronted with 'the ghastly,' the cataclysmic consequences of apartheid's racial polarisation. The government would then wish that Turner had not been killed, that Naudé had been given 'a few more years of addressing South Africa'. When there would be no more whites who were 'prepared to stretch' the hand of friendship, 'not just in words and thoughts but in actual action,' and blacks would only be confronted with 'an expression of bad will' and the only recourse would be violent revolution and interracial war.¹⁵ Also speaking at the memorial service were Dr. Alan Paton, the Catholic Archbishop of Durban, Denis Hurley, Prof. Lawrence Schlemmer, past NUSAS president, Charles Nupen, organizer of the Transport and General Workers Union, Thizi Khumalo, principal of the University of Natal, Prof. N.D. Clarence, Chairman of the Natal Indian Congress, M.J. Naidoo, and Turner's mother, Jane. The common theme was Turner's generosity of person, how his personal vision matched the transcendental ethic of religion, that South Africa had lost someone of unusual gifts. He had been selfless in the service of his society, providing advice where needed, who was, as Khumalo put it, 'always prepared to listen'.¹⁶

After 1977, younger political activists, radicalised by Soweto and the subsequent countrywide uprisings, took up the political initiative. With the core of the Black Consciousness movement's leadership either in prison, dead or in exile, and the institutional nexus of earlier progressive organisations destroyed, they looked to the ANC in exile with

¹³ Turner Papers, 'A Commemoration of the Life and Work of Richard Turner: Speeches made at the memorial service,' (Diakonia, 1978?), 5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

thousands leaving the country to join the armed struggle.¹⁷ The trade union activity, catalysed by the Durban Strikes of 1973 and intellectuals aligned to the trade unions, also gathered momentum after 1977. Turner's legacy in Durban left an imprint through the students and colleagues he helped shape, who would remain committed to trade union activism. The government repression of the 1960s has created a distinct gap in black party politics. The exile of the African nationalist organisations and the disbanding of the Liberal Party facilitated a grassroots political engagement that took inspiration from international democratic struggles. Black Consciousness held out the importance of black pride or 'beingness,' personal fulfilment and growth, a more meaningful and rational basis for the future South African society. Whilst Biko recognised racial difference in terms of historical experience, he still held out the possibility for a future synthesis, achieved through Black Consciousness, which would be an authentic resolution to the reality of white racism and colonialism. Strict ideological orthodoxy was tempered by his more pragmatic openness to avenues for meaningful change.

Black Consciousness emerged out of a set of relationships, which the focus of the SASO activists' early rhetoric attested to. The Christianity of black students and black leaders needed to be reformulated to be relevant, ecumenism and its assumed multiracialism lacked political direction. SASO sought to distance itself from NUSAS and the wider cause of student solidarity, and it looked to chart its own course. Class and gender (particularly women's liberation) were potentially undermining distractions from the true cause and the correct perspective, the liberation from racial self-hate and racial oppression. Their utilisation of city spaces ensured that activists maintained communication that held to a common political vision facilitated by the logic of ecumenical endeavour. The SASO and BPC offices in Durban, Beatrice Street, or at the university's Medical School; the UCM offices in Jorissen Street, Johannesburg, for a few years in the early 1970s; in Cape Town, at the Mowbray Centre – all were spaces utilised by Black Consciousness activists. In this way, they constituted radical spaces, through their interrelationships, which formed the basis of both their existential, cultural and political disagreements, and consensuses, about the political solution and future of South Africa.

The legacies of Turner, and Biko and Black Consciousness, especially, remain contested. Black Consciousness remains a challenging and uncomfortable corrective to the

¹⁷ Lobban, *White Man's Justice*, 249 and discussion in S. Johnson, "The Soldiers of Luthuli": Youth in the Politics of Resistance in South Africa' in S. Johnson (ed.), *South Africa: No Turning Back* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 94 – 154.

euphoric multiracialism of ‘new’ South African nation building, particularly by its focus on the continued exploitation and disempowerment of the black masses.¹⁸ But what Biko’s memory does not immediately make apparent, is that in its historical moment, Black Consciousness could be tempered by open engagement, that reasoning, searching and dialogue were paradoxically maintained together with the necessity of polarisation. No doubt, Black Consciousness bore the personal imprint of its key intellectual and political leader and there were those less disposed to such open engagement, but the strength of the Black Consciousness message during its historical moment was as much due to its ability to *convert* liberals, and as its message resonated with the utopian hopes of radical Christians and socialists. As radical Christians of the 1960s questioned their own beliefs, it remains to ask for Black Consciousness: could the message have become divorced from the historical context? A call to maturity, personal growth and a qualified openness was inherent to the political vision of the leaders of Black Consciousness, for whom the ideas were more of ‘a way of being’ than a political orthodoxy, and in which personal liberation necessarily preceded political freedom.

This thesis has explored more closely the historical context of Black Consciousness, and taken its own claims to importance more seriously than have many observers and critics. Black Consciousness has emerged as a powerful contribution to a South African dialogue as to what constitutes an authentic citizen in a modern nation state. Black Consciousness emerged from the womb of religious organisations, as we saw Pityana remark in the introduction. The thesis has shown that religion had modernised in the 1960s and that political concerns with the oppression of the ‘Third World’ were important currency in church circles. In the ecumenical movement, greater membership by churches from the developing world pushed the WCC to a stronger stance on social justice issues. The political circumstances in South Africa, after the African national organisations were forced underground and into exile in the 1960s, ensured that black aspirations were channelled through what means were available, particularly Christian student organisations. These organisations, at the segregated universities and seminaries, provided the space for Black students to meet and discuss their ideas.

The 1960s had also dealt harsh blows to white liberalism; the trauma of the ARM episode and the decision to disband the Liberal Party in 1968 after the government forbade

¹⁸ A. Mngxitama, ‘We need to break free of stranglehold of white revolutionaries,’ *Sowetan*, 23 February 2010. Found at: <http://www.sowetan.co.za/Columnists/AndileMngxitama/Article.aspx?id=1116868> (accessed 26 March 2010).

multiracial political parties. When SASO broke from NUSAS, the white liberal leaders searched for an alternative form of politics. The arrival of Turner on the scene in 1966, the articulate challenge of Biko, Pityana, and SASO leaders, facilitated a rethinking of white students' political role. In their final acceptance that they could only *assist* the black struggle, white students turned their attention to the activities such as the Poverty Datum Line research and Wages Commissions across the country. In Durban, the presence of SASO, the intellectual leadership of Turner and Biko, were powerful influences that, amongst other things, galvanised a hard-core group of white student activists. The early confidence that saw NUSAS president, Duncan Inness, claim South Africa as 'our country, our responsibility' was replaced with a challenge, as formulated by Turner, and Biko in a different way, to prove their identity through their ethical choices and through their political activity.

Despite their personal friendships, Biko and SASO responded warily to attempts by whites to join the black struggle. In the early 1970s black students had expended a great deal of intellectual labour clarifying their correct focus. At the same time as dialogue with other activists was a stimulating source of new ideas, black activists fought to keep this focus. While they embraced the fashions of Black America, with their speech interspersed with Americanisms, SASO responded more critically to a wider exultant mood of amorphous freedom, and mounted an intellectual critique and rejection of the more challenging implications of feminism.

Black Consciousness also fitted closely into the deep and powerful contestation over religious belief, present in South Africa from the arrival of missionaries. Like the Christian student organisations, the *de facto* segregated seminaries were significant spaces in which Black Consciousness ideas took root. The emergence of Black Theology as a complementary discourse, sought to address the particular concerns of the Black clergy and laity, but also provided the ideological resource necessary to sustain personal sacrifices for the political struggle to end apartheid. Radical Christians working with the Christian Institute provided another source of support for activists, as well as an alternative context that linked into progressive movements worldwide. The close relationship with Black Consciousness helped the leaders of the Christian Institute to move towards a more radical position and accept the political leadership of blacks. The confidence in white political custodianship that had characterised the Spro-cas reports, gave way to this realisation.

These conclusions indicate that Black Consciousness was a compelling product of the 'lull' in aboveground political activity of the 1960s. Whether admitted or not, white

liberals were more than the enemy left behind. They refused to be dismissed into complete irrelevance. As a product of South African civil society, Black Consciousness was also a discourse of broader social, philosophical and theological implications. It grew in the churches, was embraced by radical Christians and was endorsed by black Christian leaders. It is apparent that the importance, and salience, of Black Consciousness is due to the abiding resonances it holds with South Africa and with the powerful movements of social change of the post-war world. Black Consciousness remains a powerful, contested legacy, whose resonances and memory has resisted attempts, for example by the ANC, to accommodate it within their own nationalist teleology. This indicates that its mission and challenge of true reconciliation of South Africans on the basis of economic justice and cultural equality, has not yet been achieved under South Africa's democracy.

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